



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>









600072420L







# FAR ABOVE RUBIES.

A Novel.

BY

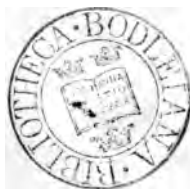
MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH," "CITY AND SUBURB," "TOO MUCH ALONE,"  
"THE RACE FOR WEALTH," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

Second Edition.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1867.

[The Right of Translation and Reproduction reserved.]

250. n. 291.



LONDON : PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET  
AND CHURCH LANE.

## CONTENTS OF VOL. III.



### CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
A GLIMPSE OF THE CANVAS .. .. .	1

### CHAPTER II.

GREAT SUCCESSES .. .. .	18
-------------------------	----

### CHAPTER III.

"LIKE A MAN'S HAND" .. .. .	43
-----------------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV.

AT KEMMS PARK .. .. .	67
-----------------------	----

### CHAPTER V.

THE PAPER WAR .. .. .	89
-----------------------	----

### CHAPTER VI.

FOR EVERMORE .. .. .	115
----------------------	-----

### CHAPTER VII.

IN BERRIE DOWN LANE .. .. .	145
-----------------------------	-----

### CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN TO WOMAN .. .. .	171
------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER IX.

DIFFICULTIES	..	..	..	..	..	..	PAGE 199
--------------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-------------

## CHAPTER X.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS	..	..	..	..	..	..	225
-------------------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

## CHAPTER XI.

FORGOTTEN	..	..	..	..	..	..	251
-----------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

## CHAPTER XII.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH	..	..	..	..	..	..	267
-------------------------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

## CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSET AT BERRIE DOWN	..	..	..	..	..	..	298
-----------------------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

# FAR ABOVE RUBIES.



## CHAPTER I.

### A GLIMPSE OF THE CANVAS.

WHETHER the moneys, with a memorandum of which the promoter so obligingly furnished him, had ever come into his hands or not, Arthur Dudley still felt a certain sense of having been cheated—of having been made the cat's-paw wherewith Mr. Black's chestnuts were drawn out of the fire. He knew, although to the letter Mr. Black's statements might be correct, still that in the spirit he had deceived him grossly.

He was perfectly well aware the meaning conveyed to him by the Company "paying all," was that he, Arthur Dudley, should never have to meet

a single bill, nor be a penny the worse for the money he had advanced to float the Protector.

Bitterly now he remembered Nellie and his stock—the latter sold at a considerable sacrifice. The young bullocks and the fat beeves, the flocks of sheep, and the lambs which ought to have been kept over the winter, appeared again, and formed a sad procession before his mind's eye. Hay parted with before the price rose at the turn of the year; wheat threshed off and sent to market, when the markets were falling instead of rising; straw disposed of at rates which scarcely left a margin of profit, after deducting cartage and expenses—these things recurred to the Squire's memory, and roused fresh anger in his heart against the man who had led him so grievously astray.

Now he recollected Mr. Stewart's prophetic words, and cursed that gentleman's clear-sightedness as he did so. Now he recalled those sentences—"I am prepared to lose, and you are not;" "I can afford to wait; you, perhaps, are differently situated;" and they seemed to make his difficulty clear in a moment. "He was not prepared to lose—he was not able to wait." He had stretched his arm out

farther than he could draw it back ; to lose, with him meant ruin ; to wait, meant anxiety and distress unutterable.

What should he do ? Looking back over the events of the previous twelve months, Squire Dudley lamented his own credulity and anathematized Mr. Black. He did not regret joining the Protector, or accepting the secretaryship, or leaving Berrie Down, but he bit his nails and drummed upon the table, and then, rising, kicked his chair over, and walked up and down the room, while he called himself all the names imaginable for having accepted bills and spent money, and bought the house in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

He had been eager to buy that house the moment Mr. Black said it was in the market. He would scarcely take time to look over the premises before closing with the owner, so fearful was he of another purchaser forestalling him ; but he forgot all this now, and worked himself up into the belief that the promoter had given him no rest till the deposit was paid and the deeds were signed.

He had thought himself so clever, and, behold, another hand stretched out beyond his, secured the

prize. He had got nothing but a thousand a year and his shares, and he had to work for his thousand a year, do a vast amount more than "read the *Times*, and talk to people." He had to write letters, at least dictate them, or else put down the heads which were to be written, and then see that his clerk filled them in properly, which the clerk never did sufficiently well to satisfy Arthur, who, on the whole, declared he found it easier to take the correspondence himself, than "to try to hammer the sense of what he wanted conveyed into any other person's stupid head."

He had to be at the office for a certain number of hours every day, and to see and discourse with hundreds of "perfect idiots"—shareholders—who, it is only fair to add, went away with the impression that Mr. Dudley was far too fine a gentleman to understand anything of the affairs of the Company to which he was secretary.

Further, the directors expected him to know every circumstance connected directly or indirectly with the Protector, whether that circumstance were in his department or not. Especially, there sat on the board a General Sinclair, C.B., who was the very

plague and torment of Arthur Dudley's life ; who was always asking for information ; eternally wanting the secretary to "refer back," continually reverting to something which had occurred at the very creation of the Company, and of which the present secretary had no cognizance whatever.

A change this from Berrie Down Hollow ; from doing what he liked, as he liked, without question asked by any one ; a change this from coming and going as he pleased ; from refraining from work ; from wandering idly and purposelessly round the farm.

He detested the work, but he liked the thousand a year ; he could not bear what he called the drudgery of London life, but he delighted in London gaiety, and in that gaiety he had expected to participate without ever having to labour before he enjoyed.

This life which he was leading ; this life—and one a hundred times more agreeable, Mr. Black had told him, should be his—for the mere price of Nellie advanced into the Protector, Limited ; and now it was no thanks to Mr. Black he was even in London at all ; Mr. Stewart had procured him this



trashy appointment, which he would have spurned excepting as a stepping-stone to something much better. Everybody had made, and was making, a fortune out of the Company excepting himself, and it was his money which had floated it; his money which had enabled Mr. Black to buy that place at Ealing, and furnish it without a second thought as to the cost!

But in this conclusion, Arthur Dudley—like all people who, reasoning in a passion, reason illogically—chanced to be wrong. His few thousands would have made but a very poor figure when placed to the credit of Mr. Black's recent purchases; they would have been a drop in the ocean, a blade of grass on the prairie, a single crow amongst the occupants of a rookery. Those poor thousands were many for a poor man to lose; but even had he pocketed every sixpence of the money for which Arthur was responsible, the whole amount would not have tided Mr. Black over three months' expenditure.

For in those days he was "going in for the whole thing." He meant either to rise or to fall—so he informed the Crossenhams. His companies were now all floated; some of them, indeed, in course

of winding up, and out of each, and all, the promoter either had reaped, or was hoping to reap, largely. He had a dozen irons in the fire. On the strength of his connection with the Protector, he had suddenly become a man "looked after" by those who had a "good thing" in view.

As he had looked after Allan Stewart, so minor promoters now began to look after and solicit him. He dressed as Peter Black, Esquire, had never dressed before. His light summer overcoat was a work of art to be admired by clerks and porters as a "West End cut;" his boots were articles of attire to be envied; while his hats looked as though they had been that moment taken out of silk paper, and placed jauntily on his head. He had abundant leisure now for attending to the adornment of his outward man, and he did attend to it thoroughly.

The Hoxton days, when he shaved before a piece of broken looking-glass, and performed the very slight ablutions to which he treated his person in a blue Delft washing-basin about six inches in diameter, were left at a convenient distance; and Peter Black, Esquire—quite another individual from the Mister Black who inhabited those wretched lodgings in a

street leading out of Pitfield Street, Hoxton—had his house fitted up with hot and cold baths (which he used), while his dressing-table was furnished with as many oils, and scents, and pomades, as might have sufficed to dress up an old beauty for her three thousandth ball.

All of which things Arthur remembered, and was wroth accordingly. Had his money not helped to start the Protector? and had Mr. Black not promised to go shares with him? Certainly he had told him as plainly as he could speak that he should have the half of that twenty or thirty thousand pounds he expected to make out of the Company, providing only he lent him in the first instance a hundred pounds!

Arthur Dudley had neither sense enough nor wit enough to perceive the absurdity of this climax. He was awfully stupid, and he had implicitly believed, and here was the result.

He had really thought he should, from one seed, reap immediately a whole field of wheat; he had really credited what a very clever and a very plausible man implied to be the fact, and many a reader will, I know, laugh at him for his credulity,

or else scoff at me for drawing the portrait of an impossibly confiding man.

We may presume, and we do presume, of course, that ladies and gentlemen who subscribe to Mudie's would be much cleverer than all this comes to, but still there are other ladies and gentlemen who, taking in the daily papers and reading therein : "Ten pounds wanted for one week ; fifteen pounds will be given for the above at the end of seven days ; ample security deposited," see and believe just as Arthur Dudley heard and believed likewise. Even amongst the ladies and gentlemen who do subscribe to Mudie's, it is most probable there may have been a few who, in times gone by, deluded by plausible circulars, took shares in some of Mr. Black's companies, and, as a natural consequence, lost their money ; and—since there is no one who speaks so loudly against the errors of his former religion as an apostate—doubtless the individuals to whom I refer will declare Arthur Dudley's credulity to be wicked, if not impossible.

Deferentially I stand aside, while the book is laid down, and the suitable oration delivered, then with all due respect I take up the thread of my story

once again, and speak of things which are taking place every day in the City, where fresh dupes come hourly to be fleeced, and fresh shearers, no more tender or scrupulous than Mr. Black, attend to relieve the unsuspecting sheep of their superfluous wool.

Arthur Dudley was to have had half!

Remembering this, which in the hurry and confusion of his interview with Mr. Black he had forgotten, the secretary took his hat, and walked off to the City.

Sooner than his friend had expected he accepted that gentleman's invitation, and entering the offices in Dowgate Hill, where another company—the "Universal Law Stationery"—was in course of formation, found the promoter up to his ears in business, with half a dozen people waiting to see him.

"Tell Mr. Black I will not detain him five minutes," said Arthur, quite loud enough for the whole congregation to hear, after, it may be remarked, the pleasing fashion of country people in London. "You know me, don't you?" he added, seeing the clerk hesitate, "I am the secretary of the Protector Bread Company."

Thereupon the visitors each drew his own conclusion. Some, very green indeed, thought what a great man Mr. Dudley must be, thus to force himself into the presence of the magnificent director; others, less easily impressionable, decided that a screw had got loose in the Protector, which Mr. Black was expected to set right. At all events, they each and all began working out the problem of what the secretary could want with his principal, while Arthur marched into the presence of the great man, and found him not engaged with any individual, but simply writing his letters for post.

"What's up with you?" were his first words; "has any one come for a million of shares? or is there a fire at Stangate—or—or what the devil brings you into the City at such a time of day as this?"

"Our conversation this afternoon," Arthur answered, boldly. "I could not rest; it is not fair, Mr. Black; you have not treated me as I should have treated you. Do you remember what you said to me that day when this matter was first mooted between us?"

"Pray sit down," said Mr. Black, magnificently,

waving his visitor to a seat, "and explain your meaning to me quietly, if you can. Do I remember what? we said so many things that day it would be impossible for me to recollect all, or indeed any, of them, unless recalled to my memory."

"Do you remember what you said about going half profits with me?" Arthur asked.

"I can't say that I do. Were there any profits then to share?"

"Prospective profits," the other answered. "You said you expected twenty or thirty thousand pounds out of the 'Protector,' and that whatever you got, you would go shares with me."

"Did I?" asked Mr. Black, innocently. "I wish, Dudley, you had chosen any other time in the day than this for coming to pester about bygones," he added, "for I have no end of letters to write; but, however, as you are here, say all you have got to say."

"I have nothing to say excepting what I have already said," answered Arthur, "namely, that you promised to go shares with me in the Bread Company."

"Now, that is exactly the objection I have to

doing business with a gentleman," remarked Mr. Black; "it is impossible to make him understand, excepting literally, a sentence which would be plain as a pikestaff to a boy in the London streets. Tell me the construction you took out of that speech, which, I confess, I never remember to have uttered."

"You said you would have twenty or thirty thousand out of this bakery affair, and were willing to give me half."

"Precisely! not willing to give you half of my earnings, but willing to give you a chance of winning fifteen thousand, which you would have done but for that meddling idiot, Stewart. He has dished me, too, you know. Deuce a thing I have had out of the Company except trouble, my shares, and position. It certainly has given me position. I meant we should have made—you and I together—thousands and thousands out of it, instead of which, when I had served my gentleman's turn, he bows me off with, 'The Company won't bear this, and the Company can't afford that. Whatever houses and offices we buy, must be bought on the mart. Our grain shall not be supplied through any friend of yours. I shall put in my own people to see you do not make sixpence



out of that which owes its very existence to you.' Damn him," added Mr. Black, heartily; "the next time I go praying and begging for a great man's name, I'll get what I have got this time—insolence instead of thanks—the door instead of money."

There was no sham about Mr. Black's manner while he delivered himself of this sentence.

Clearly, Allan Stewart had rubbed his hair up the wrong way, and hurt the promoter grievously in the process. Arthur sat silent for a moment, surprised—wondering what he had best say next, and, while he meditated, Mr. Black opened his mouth again:

"And, on the top of all this, you come," he proceeded; "you come dissatisfied with what I have done for you—indignant that I have failed to do more. You are angry because I could not force the Company to buy that cursed place of yours in Lincoln's Inn, which, I wish to Heaven, had never been for sale, just as though Stewart did not serve me the same trick about that shop in the Poultry. I bought it on spec, pulled the old buildings down, ran up a splendid new shop as far as the first floor, and then offered it to the board. Do you think they would have it? 'Pooh, pooh!' says Mr

Stewart ; ‘ what do we want with establishments in the Poultry ? Less expensive situations will do for us ;’ and the confounded thing was thrown upon my hands. Had it not been for the ‘ London and Home Counties Bank,’ which had on its board a man I knew, I should have been swamped—I tell you fairly that I should, Dudley. As it was, I sold my interest to the Company at a switching profit, which enabled me to give my friend ten per cent. on the purchase-money, and that pulled me through ; and there the bank is now as prosperous a concern as any in London. Shares up to eight premium.”

It might all be true. With a terrible shock it occurred to Squire Dudley that there were other people besides himself in the world—other people looking for their halves, and percentages, and paid-up shares also.

In a moment he seemed to understand that he had taken a hand at a game of chances, in which no one, not even those best experienced in the cards, could ensure success. It was a lottery in which he had embarked ; and, although he might blame those who had led him up to the wheel, still he felt he could not complain when the man who had been most

sanguine of success drew a blank also. He was a gentleman. Even in his blackest hour of need, Arthur, with all his faults, weaknesses, and sins, never was untrue to his training and his ancestry. He had been born—weak fool though he was—a gentleman, bred one, remained one, and he could not bandy words with this clever, plausible swindler, who, seeing his companion's hesitation, continued :

“I have not much time to spare this afternoon, for I have letters to write, and lots of people to see ; but as I perceive you are dissatisfied, Dudley, I'll tell you what I'll do : transfer to you a couple of hundred of my shares in the 'Protector,' paid up. That's two thousand pounds, at the worst ; and if I see I can do anything more for you, I will. Don't be in too great a hurry, old fellow. That is the worst of all you country people—you think a fortune is to be made just in a minute. I'll stand by you, if you stand by me. I swear it to you, Dudley ; there's my hand upon it. Now, do not—do not, I entreat of you, go and make yourself and that dear wife of yours uncomfortable. If you have to raise a few thousands on Berrie Down, what matter ? Did

Berrie Down ever do anything for you that you should do anything for it? Stick to the Protector and Allan Stewart—that's my advice; and when you are in any difficulty come to me—that is my advice also. Now, good-bye—ta-ta—God bless you, Dudley!"

And thus exit Squire Dudley without speaking a word he had intended, but with a very strong impression on his mind that Mr. Black, having been making free with the contents of a certain bottle, labelled "Martell," ordinarily concealed in the recesses of one of Tann's "Reliance" safes, must, therefore, have spoken the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

As though people did not tell worse fibs when they are drunk than when they are sober, more especially in London—as though "*In vino veritas*" were not an exploded creed with the rising generation, many of whom do not speak truth either in their cups or out of them.

## CHAPTER II.

## GREAT SUCCESSES.

WHILE the events I have related were influencing, more or less, the Dudley family history, the "Protector Flour and Bread Company" was succeeding to an extent which it is given to few companies in our time to equal.

If a person be sufficiently interested in the prices of miscellaneous companies' shares, to run his eye down a list of, say, a hundred and fifty of the new Limited Liabilities, he will be surprised to find how few out of the number are quoted as being at par, to say nothing of at a premium. Dis., dis., dis., is the encouraging legend attached to one after another; but it was not thus with the Protector—steadily its shares went up. It grew to be considered a good investment. The ten pound shares (two pounds paid)

were eagerly sought after ; and, had an intending investor gone, about that period, to any broker, and expressed his desire of purchasing into the Protector Bread Company, he would have been advised he was acting wisely—that the shares were very good property indeed.

And so every one believed. In all directions the Company's vans were to be encountered conveying bread to the far-away depôts, or else returning empty from the extremest ends of London. The bread was good ; the directors—greatly to the disgust of their housekeepers and cooks, who were thus cheated out of a legitimate perquisite in the shape of commission—ate of the staff of life kneaded at their own bakeries, and were satisfied.

If an inferior batch were produced, woe to the master baker, on whom, straight away, General Sinclair poured his vials of wrath. If the flour were sour, as servants frequently declared it to be, Mr. Bailey Crossenham's ears tingled for a week.

Never was a company better managed ; never a staff more rigidly superintended.

Did Linnor, at the most easterly point of London, running short of bread, borrow a few loaves from

his neighbour, Mr. Bickley, and supply them as the genuine product of the Protector, Limited, down came a note from the Secretary's office, informing Mr. Linnor, by "order of the board," that if such dereliction from the paths of duty occurred again, he, Mr. Linnor, would forthwith be dismissed from the responsible position which he held.

Neither for those brilliant creatures, dressed in orange and green, who conveyed the bread from Stangate to all parts of the metropolis, was there such a thing as liberty. Their carts were numbered, and if, on the hottest day in summer, they stopped at the "Spotted Stag," in Mile End Road, or the "White Hart," in Newington, or the "Greyhound," in Fulham, or any other favourite house of call, for a pot of beer, 16, or 48, or 33, or 27, was had up the same evening before the yard superintendent, and "cautioned" for all the world—so the men themselves said—as if the "governor was a beak."

If, after this caution, any one still preferred ale to employment, he was paid his wages and discharged on the spot.

Altogether, it was a very perfectly-managed Company, and quite a credit to its directors.

Great people, when the periodical philanthropic fit attacked their ranks, were not above driving over to Stangate, and inspecting the works ; and, on the occasion of such visits, the *Times* would come out with a leader, concerning pure bread and the adulteration of food, which always sent the shares up on the Stock Exchange, and made the aristocracy feel that they had conferred vast benefits on the labouring classes.

It was nice to be associated with so excellent a Company. Good people felt that the blessing of the Almighty must rest upon an enterprise, undertaken in so Christian a spirit (there was much mention of the poor in the prospectus), and that He, who had fed the Israelites with manna in the wilderness, would likewise satisfactorily regulate the Protector's dividends ; for which reason, and others too numerous and varied to mention, both great people and good people, and good and great combined in the same people, bought shares in the Company, sincerely believing that, since time began, there had never been any creature born so deserving of universal support and encouragement as Mr. Black's baby, which was now a great child able to run alone, and



earn something for itself, and even repay its benefactors a portion of the money advanced to start it fairly in the world.

When the first half-yearly meeting was held, the directors not merely announced a dividend at the rate of fifteen per cent. per annum, but also stated their conviction, that the close of another half year would exhibit a much larger proportion of profit, since the expenses of conducting such a business in the first instance were necessarily greater than would subsequently prove the case.

Moreover, it was resolved that no further call should be made on the shareholders, except in the event of larger mills and more extensive premises being required, when, as a natural consequence, higher dividends might confidently be expected.

The directors had pleasure in communicating the existence of a large reserve fund ; and in stating that the mills at Stangate had been greatly increased in size, that the machinery was the very best known for the purposes required, that every modern improvement in the grinding of wheat and manufacture of flour was to be found on the premises, and that, as regarded the bakehouse, it was decidedly the

---

most spacious, convenient, and best ventilated in the kingdom.

All this, and a vast amount more, being duly reported in the daily and weekly papers, shares (money at the time chancing to be cheap) went up again.

Then, the magazine-writers got hold of the Protector as a nucleus on which might be constructed a few light and entertaining papers concerning bread-making from the beginning of time, tracing the progress of the staff of life from the kneading-troughs of the Israelites down to the works of the new Company at Stangate.

There was no difficulty about inspecting the Protector's premises. A man, salaried on purpose, received ordinary visitors at the gates, and escorted them through the whole process from grinding to kneading, that is, if they came at an hour when kneading was in progress—as literary gentlemen always did.

“Wheat, from the Ear to the Breakfast Table,” was the exhaustive title of one paper. Another, supposed to be written by the same author, appeared as “Hot Rolls!” “Our Daily Bread” graced the

columns of one of the religious periodicals ; while, "Adulteration Considered Morally and Socially," was universally attributed by the critics to the pen of one of the most gifted and thoughtful authoresses of the day.

With all these helps, was it any wonder that the shares of the Protector should soon be at a premium ? that every one connected with the Company felt himself to be to some extent a person of consequence ; that Arthur Dudley forgot his fears, and only remembered his interest in the great concern ; that even the mortgaging of Berrie Down grew in time to be a mere bagatelle—a trifle not worth fretting about ?

What might the shares not ultimately touch ! Supposing the ten pound share, paid up, came in time to be worth a hundred pounds, why, his income would be enormous ; and there was nothing to prevent the shares going on rising, rising in value. If they reached fifty, would he sell ? Arthur could not decide this point to his own satisfaction. If he sold, he should then have no anxiety about loss ; but, on the other hand, would it be wise to sell before they reached their maximum ? Then, who ever could tell when the maximum was reached ?

These were the questions which perplexed the Squire, building his castles in the air, while pacing on the calm summer evenings round and round Lincoln's Inn Fields, smoking the while such cigars as never fall to the lot of any one, save secretaries and others of the same ilk, who get all sorts of good things given to them by all kinds of singular people.

Arthur, in the days of which I am now writing, never bought a cigar by any chance. He had boxes of the best Havannas sent him, which he was now not too proud to accept.

The world had gone round since he strolled a poor man through the fields at Berrie Down. Accepting a favour did not, according to the new code, mean placing himself under an obligation. No; it rather meant conferring an obligation on the donor.

What those donors expected Arthur Dudley would be able to do for them, it is impossible even to conjecture. Arthur himself never knew; and so, with an untroubled conscience, he smoked his cigars and dreamed his dreams.

At this time, Heather was away from home—away at the seaside with her children, whom she

took down to Hastings, for a month, in the hope that sea-air might do Lally more good than all Dr. Chickton's prescriptions.

Quite as tenderly as he had treated Master Charles Hope, that renowned practitioner inquired into Lally's symptoms, and devoted himself to the restoration of her health; but for all this care the child proved ungrateful.

She did not get much better. All the tonics Doctor Chickton could prescribe, and Heather with difficulty persuade her to take, failed to restore her health, to make the little feet patter, patter over the floor as of old.

She could walk a short distance, certainly, without much fatigue, and drive for an hour or so at a time, but still she was not the Lally of a twelvemonth previously.

"What's the use of cramming the child with all that physic?" Doctor Marsden inquired one day when he called in Lincoln's Inn Fields. "Chickton ordered it, did he? of course he did. When you go and pay a man a guinea, he must order you something; but now, without a guinea at all, I will give you my advice, which is none the worse for

being gratuitous. Take her to the seaside; let her be out all day long; if she will bear bathing, bathe her; if that don't set her up, nothing will."

Very heartily Heather wished she could have told Doctor Marsden, that, considering his son was the cause of Lally's illness, she thought the least he could do was to proffer his advice civilly; but advice in any shape was not to be despised, and accordingly she adopted his suggestion, and bore Lally off.

At Hastings, she met not merely Mr. and Mrs. Compton Raidsford and family, but also Mr. Allan Stewart; who, after a time, took rather kindly to Lally, and became interested in her recovery.

Like all the rest of the world, he too had his favourite medical man, whom he not merely counselled Heather to consult, but to whom also he wrote a letter of introduction, in which he described her as his friend, Mrs. Dudley.

They had been the merest acquaintances in town; but intimacy is of quick growth when people meet every day, and fifty times a day, on the sands, on the Parade, in the lodgings of mutual friends, standing listening to the bands, and to the solitary murmur of the sea as it flows in on the shore.

From Mrs. Raidsford, Heather heard how admirably Agnes was managing Berrie Down.

“What a wonderful creature she must be!” continued the lady; and yet, Heather fancied there was a tone of disparagement in Mrs. Raidsford’s remark, for which she was at a loss to account, until informed that “Miss Baldwin was never out of the house;” “has taken to your sisters quite as if they were her own.”

This was not exactly news to Heather, for she had understood from Agnes that Miss Baldwin continued very kind indeed; but why the fact should irritate Mrs. Raidsford puzzled her, until one of the Misses Raidsford, observing, “Yes, we are entirely forgotten now—Miss Baldwin is fond of new faces,” threw some light upon the subject.

That Miss Baldwin should ever have been fond of the Misses Raidsford’s faces, surprised Heather not a little; but still she knew that Kemms Park had at one time patronized Moorlands, and was able to comprehend now where the sting of the Berrie Down acquaintanceship lay.

With all her heart she wished Miss Baldwin would leave the girls alone. Beyond all things she

dreaded their being exposed to jealous and envious remarks. The blessed seclusion, the utter privacy in which they had hitherto lived, must, she knew, have quite unfitted them to bear unkind speeches, or ill-natured inuendoes with equanimity.

Had she acted rightly in leaving them alone at Berrie Down—alone to receive many visitors, and to bear the brunt of such gossip as that in which she perceived Mrs. Raidsford was not above indulging? The new acquaintances, whom Heather in her innocence had imagined would make the country a pleasanter residence for the girls, might only expose their conduct to misconstruction. She had no fear of anything Agnes and Laura might say or do, but she felt afraid of what might be said of them. Lord Kemms, she knew, was now at the Park, having at length returned from Austria; and in one of her letters Agnes mentioned his having called at Berrie Down with his aunt.

Could this be another thorn in Mrs. Raidsford's side? Small as was the amount of tittle-tattle which reached Heather's ears, still she had heard some talk of an attachment between Lord Kemms and one of the young ladies at Moorlands. And,



although it never entered into her mind to imagine her husband's portionless sisters could prove rivals to the great contractor's daughters, she yet gradually came to understand that Mrs. Raidsford was of a different opinion, and felt Berrie Down to be a stumbling-block in her path.

"There is some distinction come between Mr. R. and his Lordship," Mrs. Raidsford was kind enough to explain to Mrs. Dudley; "we are not on the same terms of equality with him that we used to be. I must say, I think the coolness began on our side, for Mr. R., as you, no doubt, have heard, has a perfect maniac against companies of all kinds, just as though people had not a right to make themselves into companies if they like, and it seems his Lordship told him he would have nothing to do with that 'Protective' affair of yours—no offence, Mrs. Dudley—after which he went away and becomes one of the fundamental proprietors of it. So, when his Lordship came home, Mr. R. put on his high and mighty, and would not call at the Park—as if the 'Protective' was any business of his—and so, when we meet, we only bow; and I am as satisfied as I can be of anything that his Lordship knows no more than

the babe unborn what the reason of our distance is. Indeed, he was beginning to ask me at the station, when we met him, only the train moved off before he could complete his inquiry. I think I shall write to his Lordship, and detail the matter. If Mr. R. likes to disseparate himself from old friends, that is no reason why we should — is it, Mrs. Dudley?”

In answer to which appeal, Heather said she did not know. She thought, however, she should not like to be on friendly terms with any one to whose acquaintance her husband objected.

“But, then, you are like nobody else,” retorted Mrs. Raidsford.

This remark, intended to be both hurtful and depreciating, failed of its effect, because Heather mentally hoped she was not much like Mrs. Raidsford. “A woman whom Raidsford ought to have been pilloried for marrying,” observed Mr. Stewart; “apparently, he is a very worthy fellow himself, but I am quite satisfied there must be some terrible want in the character of any person who could make such a creature his wife. There ought to be a law against those kind of marriages.”

"Perhaps——," began Heather, and then she stopped, colouring a little.

"Pray, complete your sentence, Mrs. Dudley," said Mr. Stewart; "you have roused my curiosity, and it is not fair to have it unsatisfied."

"I only hesitated lest what rose to my mind might sound ill-natured. I do not mean, however, any sneer when I say, that perhaps Mrs. Raidsford may have been very suitable to her husband when he married her. It is so difficult to express an opinion like that without appearing to reflect on a man's origin," she added, getting into unutterable depths of confusion; "but I often think about a speech, a very dear girl I once knew made, concerning Mrs. Raidsford. She said, 'it was such a pity a man could not choose again when he came to years of social discretion.'"

"She used to say also," remarked Lucy Dudley, "that if Mr. Raidsford could only have foreseen how high he was to rise in the world, Mrs. Raidsford would probably now have been wife to some mechanic—cooking steaks for his one o'clock dinner, instead of being mistress of Moorlands, and having servants much more ladylike than herself under her. Bessie never was weary of mimicking Mrs. Raidsford."

"Who was this clever young lady?" asked Mr. Stewart, for whom the very bitterness of such a speech had its peculiar charm.

"A cousin of ours," Lucy answered.

"Married, or still eligible?" inquired the old bachelor.

Lucy did not reply ; she looked at Heather, who, after a moment's embarrassed pause, replied,—

"She was engaged to be married, when with us, last winter ; but we have not heard from her since she left Berrie Down."

"Some feminine quarrel," thought Mr. Stewart ; and, looking out over the sea, he laughed softly to himself at the idea that all women were alike,—that no two women could agree ; that, let them be young or old, pretty or ugly, sweet or sour, they could still jangle and dispute like the veriest viragoes.

And yet, this Mrs. Dudley puzzled him : if she had a temper, she must, he thought, have it under wonderful control ; if there were any evil in her, she must have an astonishing power of concealing its existence. To sisters and children, to friends and servants, she was alike, gentle and forbearing. Never but once did Mr. Stewart see her eyes darken, and

her face flush under the influence of any strong emotion ; and then it was a slight thing which caused the tell-tale blood to rush to brow, and cheek, and neck.

“ I expect my niece, Mrs. Croft, to-morrow,” he said ; “ I am happy to think she will be able to make your acquaintance.”

Then there came that look, which was not quite pleasant, over Heather’s face,—that look which set Mr. Stewart marvelling as to “ what could be up ” between the two women ? Not an early jealousy, he decided ; for Mrs. Croft was many a year older than Mrs. Dudley. What could it be ? He was an especially inquisitive old gentleman, as sharp and keen concerning matters of feeling, as he was about matters of business, and so he went on,—

“ You have never met her, I think ? ”

“ Never,” Heather answered ; “ but my husband knew Mrs. Croft very well indeed at one time, and quite recently they renewed their former acquaintance at Copt Hall.”

“ Copt Hall—is not that Mr. Hope’s place ? I recollect now, Douglas and his wife were staying there last autumn. Your husband is some relation of the Essex Hopes, is he not ? ”

“His mother was a Miss Hope,” Heather explained ; and shortly afterwards Mr. Stewart took his leave, trying to remember something he had heard about Miss Laxton having jilted a former suitor when she married his nephew. “Was Dudley the lucky fellow’s name ?” he asked himself. “I’ll find out all about it when madam comes.”

In due time, madam came, and her husband with her ; and from the hour of their arrival, Heather commenced longing to return to town. Had it not been, indeed, that Lally was decidedly gaining strength, she would forthwith have packed up and departed ; but the child was better ; she could run about a little, and at times there was a colour in her face which made the poor mother trust the health and the gaiety of old was about to be restored to her.

How Mrs. Croft ridiculed Heather’s anxiety about the little girl ; how scornfully she would listen to Lally’s prattle ; with what open contempt she watched the child sometimes struggling into Mr. Stewart’s arms, and beheld him fondling and caressing her, were things to be seen, not described.

A stately woman, who looked born to rule a

nation of slaves, and seemed to regard every one with whom she came in contact, her husband included, as so much dirt under feet; a woman who would have been beautiful but for the expression of habitual bad temper on her face; a woman who made every creature she met uncomfortable; who treated Heather with supercilious insolence, and at length told her without the slightest reserve she had instructed her child well. "She is playing her cards quite as cleverly as you," finished Mrs. Croft, in a tone of suppressed fury, one day when she saw Lally throw down her wooden spade, and run with outstretched arms to meet Mr. Stewart. "Commend me to a meek, quiet woman when underhand means are to be employed, and a legacy is in question."

"Do you imagine I am expecting a legacy from any one?" asked Heather.

"Of course I do," was the reply, spoken while Mrs. Croft swept along the Marina with her dress trailing about two yards on the ground behind her; "of course I do," and her dark eyes looked over Heather scornfully; "people generally expect their godfathers to leave them something, do they not? and your godfather's money is well worth finessing for.

I commend your prudence; some persons might not think such conduct quite honourable, but that never seems to have occurred to you. Mr. Stewart has hitherto treated Mr. Croft as his heir. Now, however——”

“Mr. Stewart’s affairs have not the slightest interest for me,” interrupted Heather, hastily. “Good morning!” and, without giving her companion time to utter another word, Mrs. Dudley turned and walked back along the Parade to the point where Lally was still engaged in animated conversation with her two gentlemen friends.

“It is time for you to come in, my pet,” she said, descending one of the flights of wooden steps, and making her way with difficulty over the shingle to the sands. “If you see my sister, Mr. Stewart, would you kindly ask her to bring Leonard back? I do not like him to be out in the heat of the day. I do not think it is good for children to be on the shore when the sun has so much power.”

“Now, they have had a quarrel,” decided Mr. Stewart, glancing along the Parade, where he descried Mrs. Aymescourt Croft wending her way homewards, solitary and stately, haughty and



defiant. "I should like immensely to know what it is all about. There is something very decidedly amiss between my amiable niece and Mrs. Dudley."

"Your wife and our pretty friend do not seem able to stable their horses comfortably together," he said to Mr. Croft, when Heather, who declined all offers both of companionship and of assistance, had borne Lally—bitterly protesting against such injustice—away. "How is it, do you think?"

"My wife is jealous," was the prompt reply

"Does she fancy you are smitten?"

"No; but she thinks you are," Mr. Croft answered. "She considers that Mrs. Dudley stands too good a chance of being favourably remembered in your will, for much cordial feeling to exist amongst us."

"And why the devil should I leave Mrs. Dudley sixpence?" asked Mr. Stewart. "What is she to me that I should bequeath anything to her, more than to the first stranger I meet on the Marina?"

"My charming wife," replied Mr. Croft, in that daring tone of off-hand recklessness which, as Mr. Black had remarked, was one of his peculiarities, "my charming wife, giving you credit for a vein of

romance, and a depth of sensibility which, I confess, I never noticed in your character, imagines that the revival of old associations, the thoughts of 'Auld Lang Syne,' in fact, which the sight of Mrs. Dudley must naturally have awakened, may produce an undesirable effect upon the ultimate disposal of your property. For my part, I am delighted at the opportunity now afforded of assuring you I would much rather you left your money to Mrs. Dudley than to my wife."

"What are you talking about, Douglas?" asked his uncle. From the drawing-room window of the house they occupied Mrs. Croft could, with the aid of an opera-glass, see, not merely that Mr. Stewart stopped as he put this question, but that he looked excited and perplexed. "What is Mrs. Dudley to me, I ask again, that I should leave her sixpence? She is a sweet woman, and pretty, and devoted to her blockhead of a husband, but I should not care if I never saw her again. Does your wife think I am in love with her? Does she imagine I am so nearly doting as all that comes to?"

Douglas Croft looked steadily in his uncle's face for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"It really is too amusing," he said. "Do you

mean to tell me you do not know who Mrs. Dudley was?"

"No; who the deuce *was* Mrs. Dudley?" inquired the other, testily.

"And she never has enlightened you?" persisted Mr. Croft.

"If she had enlightened me I should have known, I suppose, and I do not know who or what she was, excepting a simpleton to marry Dudley. As you seem so well informed, tell me this wonderful secret. Who was Mrs. Dudley?"

"Heather Bell," answered Mr. Croft.

"You do not mean that?"

"I do, upon my honour. Miss Hope told me and my wife, and explained that it was you who selected the name which seems to suit her so admirably."

Mr. Stewart did not take any direct notice of this information; he only resumed his walk over the sands, saying to himself,—

"And so that is Heather Bell—so that is Heather Bell!"

"You understand now why my wife regards her with but small favour," continued Mr. Croft; "indeed, there is another reason why, perhaps,

mutually the two ladies dislike and distrust each other. Years ago, Dudley and Miss Laxton were engaged. I knew nothing of it when I met her—when I proposed to her—when she accepted me; but the engagement was a fact, nevertheless. I am so devotedly attached to her now, that there can be no indiscretion in merely alluding to her one fault—a love of money. I am confident that she liked Dudley better than she ever liked me; but I, being the richer of the two, gained the prize. Of course, it is not in a woman's nature, at least it is not in Arabella's nature, to look kindly on the wife whom the man she jilted afterwards married. On the other hand, all the world knows Dudley does not appreciate quite so highly the blessing he has gained, as the blessing he has lost; and for that reason I fancy poor Mrs. Dudley does not feel particularly comfortable in my Arabella's society. Further, there may be a little mutual jealousy, both being above the average in appearance. Now, you have the exact state of the case, so far as I know it."

Still Mr. Stewart made no reply; he only walked on more swiftly over the sands, which were at this point wet and disagreeable, while the waves came

lapping in—lapping in; and the burden of his reverie was, “So that is Heather Bell—that is Heather Bell!”

There was a story in the man’s life, though no one of his kith or kin suspected it. He had loved once—once in his middle age, when the disease always leaves traces behind—passionately! and the woman he loved was Heather’s mother; but the secret of his unrequited attachment had lain between the two; and now she was dead, and here was her child, and the child of the man who took the best hope of his life away, thrown across his path once more.

Heather Bell—Heather Bell, the waves seemed to murmur the name as they stole upon the sands; and the old man grew young again as the years faded away; and he saw, reflected as in a mirror, the bright glad face of the long, and long ago, when he first, at Sir Wingrave Bell’s, met Lilian Gladwin, who was even in those days engaged to the baronet’s cousin, William, then a poor curate in London, and afterwards the poor rector of Layford, Derbyshire.

## CHAPTER III.

“LIKE A MAN’S HAND.”

WHAT a cruel world it is ; what a hard, wicked, misjudging, uncharitable, mercenary world ! Thus Heather Dudley reflected, while, without waiting for Lucy or Leonard, she walked homewards with Lally, the hot tears filling her eyes and coursing down her cheeks as she recalled Mrs. Croft’s insulting words, as she came gradually to comprehend the full meaning of her insolent accusation.

She could not help crying ; the world’s cruelty and the world’s wickedness were new experiences to her.

The maladies of being thought ill of, of having her most innocent notions misconstrued, of hearing intentions imputed to her which she was utterly incapable of harbouring, had not fallen to her when

young, and now taken in her maturer years they seemed so severe that it was almost impossible for her to endure them patiently.

To be accused of toadying any person ; that it should for a moment be supposed she could ever have mentioned the name of her family to Mr. Stewart, when, lest it might even seem as though she were thereby preferring any claim to old acquaintanceship on him, she had sedulously avoided all allusions to her former home, or any of her early recollections.

“ I—I—do such a thing !” she thought ; “ I pay court to him for his money ; I, who detest money ; I, who could live on the merest pittance anywhere and be happy ; and who would rather live on a pittance than mix amongst hard, cruel, mercenary people ; and to imply that I was such a wretch as to school my innocent child in deceit and affectation. Ah !” she reflected, softening a little ; “ it is plain she never was a mother ; if she had been, she could not have imputed trickery of that kind to me ;” which speech showed, not how much Heather knew of mothers, but how little she knew of the world. “ It was cruel, though—” thus the mental strain ran on—“ cruel to imagine such a thing ; cruel to

express it ;” and Heather would probably have continued making these statements silently to her own heart, whilst her tears flowed as fast as her thoughts, had Lally not caused a diversion by stating :

“ You walk too quick, ma ; you tire me.” Then Heather sat down upon one of the benches and caught Lally to her ; she was ashamed that even for a moment her own anger should have made her forget the child’s possible weariness. She had gone on, dragging Lally after her, and the little one was both warm and tired with the unwonted exercise.

“ Are you hot, too, ma ?” she asked, trying to push up her mother’s veil, an attempt which Heather strove too late to resist. “ Oh ! you’ve been crying, ma ; you’ve been vexed ; was it tall wicked lady ? Never mind—Lally’s better—arn’t you glad Lally’s nearly better as well ? Do not cry, pease, mamma—pease—pease.”

And the poor, little, eager face puckered itself up to weep also ; and the brown eyes—which had in them at times a look of Heather—filled with tears, and the thin arms twined themselves about her mother’s neck, and Lally became altogether very piteous on the subject of her mother’s grief.



Looking out over the dancing sea, so bright, so sunshiny, so smooth, clasping her first-born to her heart, Heather felt that there was reason in the child's words; that, seeing Lally's health even partially restored, she had no right to weep or lament over any mere worldly grievance.

What was Mrs. Croft to her, that she should attach weight to her angry sentences, her slanderous accusations? What were they all—Mr. Stewart, and his nephew and niece? Nothing but people whom she had met for a day or two, and should perhaps meet again never more. Why should she fret over a false and libellous charge? If she were capable of such conduct as that whereof Mrs. Croft had accused her, she might then weep, but not otherwise.

She would endeavour for the future to avoid St. Leonard's. Her children should keep down by the East Parade, or amuse themselves on the Castle Hill, for the few days she purposed remaining at Hastings. No one should say she put herself or them in the way of rich people—at least, no one should say so with even a shadow of a foundation of truthfulness.

She would not do what she had in the first smart of the blow intended—pack up, and leave Hastings by the next train—but she would never subject herself to such an imputation again. She could, and she would, be out for the future when Mr. Stewart called, and she might walk at such hours and in such directions as should separate her and hers altogether from their more wealthy acquaintances.

It is quite unnecessary to add that she and Lucy had a thoroughly comfortable and exhaustive conversation on the subject that same evening after the children were in bed ; in the course of which Lucy expressed her opinion, not merely that dear Heather was quite right in her decision about Mr. Stewart, but also concerning the girls at Berrie Down.

“ We should all be ever so much happier together in town,” the young lady opined ; “ together anywhere. Could not Arthur let Berrie Down, or put in a care-taker, as Mr. Black has so often suggested ? not but that it would seem terrible to leave the Hollow altogether ; still, if we are not to live there, what is the use of having it lying empty ? ” In reply to which Heather could only answer :

“There is no place in the world like Berrie Down.” And then the pair had a little sympathetic cry, which did them both a considerable amount of good.

After all, they had spent a very pleasant month at Hastings; and though a cloud had towards the last darkened their sky, still who can expect fair weather to continue day after day?

Is not it the inevitable rule that storms must come, if only to clear the air; that women should shed tears in order that their eyes may be all the brighter afterwards? What right had Mrs. Dudley to look for a succession of sunshiny hours, when Douglas Croft, who was popularly supposed to be the most lucky fellow on earth, met with nothing but contrary winds and heavy rains during the short periods in the year he and his wife reluctantly spent together?

If there were any state of life in which Mrs. Douglas Croft would have been content, that state had still to be discovered; if there were anything her husband could have done to please her, he had certainly never hit upon it.

Did he keep the windows shut, she wondered what he was made of to sit in such a suffocating

room ; did he fling them wide open in the morning, he knew she detested a draught, and the sight of that glitter on the sea ; did he wish to ride, she thought he might have more consideration than to propose his wife mounting a hired horse ; did he suggest driving, she wondered, if he were so fond of seeing the country, he had not brought down his servants and carriages, as other people did ; did he offer to walk with her, she was invariably tired ; did he even mention leaving the house without her, she thought, "considering he favoured her with so little of his society, he might remain indoors for half an hour in the course of the day ;" did he go out in a boat, she might as well have married a London tradesman ; did he finally ask her what the devil she would have him do, since he had come to the slowest place on earth to please her and not himself, she replied, that if he had not sufficiently gentlemanly, or even manly, feeling to know how to treat his wife properly, it was a pity he ever married any one higher in rank than some poor factory girl."

"I could not have married you, remember," answered Mr. Croft, "had you not first jilted Dudley ;"

whereupon she sighed, "Poor Arthur!" and declared "*he* never would have broken a woman's heart."

"You would very soon have broken his," retorted her husband; "though, upon my honour, Dudley is the only man I should not have pitied seeing married to you."

"Because you admire that creature with red hair, whom he chose after me! after me by way of contrast, I suppose. Oh! she has not red hair? I confess I was under the delusion she had; but no doubt your opportunities of judging have been greater than mine. She is a very pretty woman, you say; of course you think every woman pretty, excepting your own wife. She is the kind of creature some men do admire, and she has that manner—that meek, mild, submissive, milk-and-water manner—which always makes me long to strike her and ask how she likes *that*. I do detest those amiable hypocrites. It is a pity you cannot get rid of me, and marry her."

"If I were to marry all the women I admire, I should have as many wives as Brigham Young," answered Mr. Croft: "besides, I am not quite certain that Mrs. Dudley is my style. She has too

much of the angel about her; certainly, ‘extremes meet’; but still, after you, that change would be almost too se ere:” and so the pair were wont to wrangle on, while Mr. Stewart sat calmly reading the *Times*, or else remarked that he never so much regretted his single condition as when he witnessed his nephew’s connubial felicity.

“It is all his fault,” Mrs. Croft was in the habit of asserting, to which Mr. Stewart invariably made reply :

“I know that, my dear Arabella, perfectly well ; no wife ever is in fault.”

“Mrs. Dudley could not be, we may suppose,” Mrs. Croft snapped back, on the day following her quarrel with Heather.

“If she could, she must differ greatly from the remainder of her sex,” answered Mr. Stewart, who was, Mrs. Croft frequently assured those lady friends that she honoured with her confidence, “one of the most disagreeable, cynical old bores a woman ever had to tolerate for the sake of his money.”

On the whole, visits from his niece were amongst the number of those blessings with which Mr. Stewart could very readily have dispensed. He liked his

nephew, and he pitied him ; but Mrs. Croft was decidedly *de trop* in any house which held at the same time Allan Stewart, Esquire, of Layford.

Very frequently, people wondered why uncle and nephew kept up separate establishments, but then it was remembered that more than once Mr. Stewart had openly regretted the fact of his only near relation having married a woman whom he never could regard in the light of a daughter.

Of this fact Mrs. Croft was perfectly well aware, and she felt madly jealous accordingly, when she beheld the increasing intimacy between Heather and her godfather.

“ She will supplant you to a certainty, Douglas,” the amiable wife remarked.

“ Well, my love, if she do, I dare say we can still, with economy, manage to exist,” answered Mr. Croft. “ Upon strict principles of justice, indeed, I think Dudley ought to have my uncle’s money ; I won you from him, you remember ; now, it seems to me, he ought to have a turn. Do not fret yourself about the matter, Arabella—I take it philosophically—why cannot you do the same ?”

“ The same ! I have no patience with such

absurdity ; but I think I have showed Mrs. Dudley there is one of the family, at least, clever enough to see what she is trying for.”

“ Do you not think it possible for a woman to be too clever, occasionally ? ” inquired her husband ; “ because it occurs to my mind you have overshot the mark by the merest trifle. My uncle did not know the touching relation in which he stood to Mrs. Dudley, until you quarrelled with her. Very possibly he would never have known, had I not, in consequence of that little flourish up the Marina, told him.”

“ You—told him ? ”

“ Yes, my love ; I considered it was only right he should know the great provocation you had received, so that he might not think the slight coolness between you and Mrs. Dudley originated in any fault on your side. He quite understands your feelings, and appreciates them fully.”

“ Douglas, you are either mad or infatuated.”

“ Do not moot the former idea before my uncle, or he may cut me off with a shilling, and so deprive you of all chance of ever managing his estates. For myself, I do not care for more money ; I am thinking of going out to Australia, and taking a sheep-



farm ; of doing the Arcadian for a few years, during which time you will marry some one else, and I shall enjoy a bachelor's existence by way of variety. I am growing horribly tired of the monotony of civilised life. I wonder if I could join a mission as a muscular Christian, and go out to convert the heathen. I should like to see how a fellow with a lot of wives manages them. I should preach the same doctrines as——”

But at this point Mrs. Croft swept out of the room, and her husband took advantage of her absence to seize his hat and leave the house, and march away in a blazing sun to Hastings, where, according to the programme she had sketched for her own guidance, Heather was not at home.

“ I am getting confoundedly tired of this,” Mr. Croft remarked to his uncle next day, as they lounged together along the Marina ; “ suppose we swear business requires our immediate presence in town ; cannot we have letters by the five o'clock post, compelling us to go up by the express to-morrow morning ? Madam in town is bad enough, but madam at a watering-place, or in the country, is scarcely to be borne.”

“What a choice you made, Douglas!” said his uncle, in a tone of plaintive rebuke.

“Did I choose at all? I doubt it,” was the reply. “Since my marriage, I often should have liked to choose; but perhaps, had power been given me to do so, I might only have made a worse mess of it. The best of a marriage like mine is, it makes a man so philosophical. It leaves one nothing to wish for, nothing to desire; jealousy, over-affection, anxiety about the dear creature’s health; sleepless nights if her fingeraches; torturing doubts if another fellow is over-zealous in finding her shawls—from all these troubles I am exempt. My domestic life leaves me nothing to fret about. Like that young man in Longfellow’s poem,—

“‘Light-hearted and content,  
I wander through the world;’

only I do not carry two locks of hair about with me and sentimentalize concerning them, so that in one respect I have an advantage over the widower.”

“If your wife were in heaven, I do not think you would carry one of her curls done up in note-paper in your left-hand waistcoat pocket, after the fashion

of a man I once knew," remarked Mr. Stewart a little grimly.

"Well, now, do you know I think I should," answered Mr. Croft; "when a woman is so kind as to die, it seems to me the least in common gratitude her husband can do, is to use his handkerchief freely, and publicly preserve little mementoes of her—the stalk of the last bunch of grapes she ate, for instance, her box of rouge, or the puff wherewith she powdered her face. To me there is something inexpressibly touching about relics; most probably because they are useless. I always notice people admire and reverence things which are utterly useless, that is one reason I am so fond of my wife. Oh! Arabella; oh, my beloved! there she stands at the window awaiting my return. Signalling for it, too, by all that's wonderful; shall we go and ascertain the cause of that waving cambric?" And Mr. Stewart agreeing, the pair crossed the road and entered the house, when they soon discovered the reason of Mrs. Croft's anxiety for their return in the shape of a telegram for Mr. Stewart, which had arrived about an hour previously.

"It is from Dudley," said that gentleman, placing

the paper in his nephew's hand. "Nice kettle of fish, is not it? We can catch the next train, I suppose?"

"What is the matter; what has happened?" inquired Mrs. Croft.

"Nothing, except that a gentleman on our board will not be reasonable," answered Mr. Stewart. "He wants talking to, I think. Come, Douglas—that is, if you are coming with me. Good-bye, Arabella, we shall be down again to-morrow."

"Good-bye, my dear," repeated Mr. Croft. "Comfort yourself, as I do, that the parting is not for ever;" and the pair hurried off to St. Leonard's Station, talking as they went about the telegram, which Mr. Stewart now tore up into little scraps, and scattered to the wind.

"My mind always misgave me concerning him," said Mr. Stewart. "I asked Black specially if he had authority for putting his name on the direction."

"It is an old trick of Black's, I believe, that of using names without permission," answered Mr. Croft; "you will see Frank, I suppose, and try to alter his purpose?"

"Yes, that is why I am now going to town ; and I asked you to accompany me, thinking you would be glad of a holiday."

"You are very kind. I do not fancy I should have much cared for a *tête-à-tête* with madam by the sad sea waves ; and Mrs. Dudley refuses to be at home to me."

"You can scarcely blame her for that," remarked his uncle.

"I am not blaming her, only I think it is carrying the theory of husband and wife being one, a little too far. However, if such be her will, I must resign myself to it."

They were standing on the platform at St. Leonard's as Mr. Croft spoke thus, and even as he spoke, the train came out of the first tunnel and stopped to take up its passengers.

"Why, good heavens, there is Mrs. Dudley," exclaimed Mr. Croft. "Can you make room for us ?" he asked, eagerly opening the door of the compartment she occupied. "Are you all returning to town ? I had not the slightest expectation of meeting you here."

"We always meant to return to-day," answered

Heather, after she had spoken to Mr. Stewart, and the two gentlemen were seated *vis-à-vis*. "But I thought you were going to remain for some time longer?"

"So we are, unhappily, I believe," he replied, putting up the window in order to keep the smoke out of the carriage while passing through the second tunnel. "I only wish," he added, as they sped on out into the sunshine again, "we were not going to remain. I think St. Leonard's the most wearisome spot on the face of the whole earth."

"And we have enjoyed our visit so much!" said Heather.

"But then ladies have resources within themselves of which we men know nothing," he answered.

"I cannot agree with that," Heather replied; "we may have resources at home, but certainly not in lodgings; and there is one thing you can do which we cannot—smoke; Lucy and I, for instance, could not have amused ourselves for a whole evening walking up and down the Parade slowly puffing cigars, as I have seen you and Mr. Stewart doing."

"No, but you could let your dresses sweep the ground," answered Mr. Croft. "I often fancy that

swish-swish of my wife's train must produce the same soothing effect upon her nerves as a cigar does on mine. Now, Miss Lally, you have not spoken one word to me for the last four days, and my heart is broken in consequence. Will you be good and talk to me now?" and Mr. Croft put out his hand to the little girl, who came tumbling over from the opposite corner to make up friends again with her old admirer, who took her on his knee, and instituted particular inquiries into the state of her health.

"Was she better—much better—able to run half a mile without getting tired?"

"Yes," she declared, "more than 'at; 'ook at mine face; ma says it has got fat;" and she put up her little hands to her cheeks, and so drew all the flesh forward for Mr. Croft to contemplate.

"Fat, are you, little one?" broke in Mr. Stewart; "not much of that, I fear; let me look at you. She does seem considerably better," he added, addressing Mrs. Dudley. "You will take her to see Mr. Henry, though, will you not?"

Heather answered that she certainly should, whereupon Lally insisted on knowing exactly who Mr. Henry was, and being informed a doctor, de-

clared she would rather not see him. "Other doctor gave me nasty stuff to drink, sour, and Lally did not like him."

"Very ungrateful on your part," remarked Lucy, "for Doctor Chickton was exceedingly kind to you."

"Didn't like him," repeated the child, determinedly; "said sour stuff wasn't bad to take, and it was dre'ful; said it would make Lally well, and it didn't. He told 'tories, he did."

"Are you glad you are going back to London?" inquired Mr. Stewart.

"No," said Lally, "don't like it either. I'd like to go home and see the chick-a-biddies, and Dash, and Nip and Nep, and the ponies, and Ned;" and so the child talked on, her eyes dancing with delight as she spoke of the old home any other little girl might almost have forgotten in the time, while Mr. Stewart looked thoughtfully in her face flushed with excitement, and wondered what value his friend, Mr. Rymner Henry, might set on her chances of life.

Mr. Croft delighted greatly in Lally. He encouraged her to be what her mamma called naughty,



to chatter away at express speed, to tell him all about Berrie Down, and Aggy, and Laura, "and then there used to be Bessie, you know," added the child. "Ah! Bessie was good to Lally. She singed to her, and dressed the beau-ful-lest dolls; but Lally will never see Bessie no more—no, never no more;" and the little face began to twitch, and the lips to tremble, and then the brown eyes filled with tears, and finally Lally lifted up her voice and wept.

"What is the matter?" inquired Mr. Stewart, who had been engaged in a conversation with Lucy. "What have you done, Douglas, to cause such grief?"

"I want to see Bessie," sobbed the child.

"And who is it that is so cruel as to prevent your seeing her?" asked Mr. Stewart.

"She is not with us now," explained Mrs. Dudley. "She was staying at the Hollow for some months before we left Hertfordshire, and Lally grew very fond of her. I cannot imagine why she so continually talks about her now, though; I do not fancy other children have such tenacious memories. Sometimes for weeks together she will never mention

Bessie’s name, and then she breaks out as you see. I wish she would not do it. It is very bad for her, fretting so much after any one. Lally, my darling, you must be patient; whenever Bessie can come to see you, she will.”

“No,” moaned Lally, “no more. Bessie will come to Lally back again, never no more.”

There was something terribly pathetic about the child’s grief even to those who knew nothing whatever of Bessie, or of the circumstances connected with her departure.

“Can’t she come and see the child?” asked Mr. Stewart, a little testily. “Surely, if she be at all within reach, such a yearning as this might be gratified.”

“Perhaps so,” Heather answered, “if we knew where she was; but I have never heard from her since she last left Berrie Down.”

“Did you part in anger then?” Mr. Stewart inquired, true to his theory concerning women’s quarrels.

“In anger!” Heather repeated in astonishment, “when we all loved Bessie as though she had been one of our own household! Why she does not write to

me, I cannot tell, only I know she has some good reason for her silence; and I would rather not talk about her any more, or, perhaps, like Lally, I shall begin to be foolish and cry too." An explanation necessitated by the fact that Mrs. Dudley was crying partly because of her child's grief, and partly because she never could speak of Bessie without a feeling of bitter sorrow.

After that there fell a sudden silence on the party, during the continuance of which Heather employed herself in adjusting Master Leonard's collar, which was crooked to an unimaginable extent; Mr. Stewart read the newspaper; Lucy looked at Heather; and Mr. Croft, his chin resting on Lally's head, gazed out of the window, his thoughts wandering the while miles, and miles away.

"Do you expect Mr. Dudley to meet you?" asked Mr. Stewart, when the train had passed New Cross, and was speeding on through Bermondsey.

"No," Heather answered; "but his brother will be at the station."

"Oh! he has brothers."

"Two," Heather explained; and a few minutes

afterwards she was introducing Alick to Mr. Stewart, who looked on him not ungraciously, while Mr. Croft stood a little apart, apparently by no means desirous of making Mr. Alexander Dudley’s acquaintance.

“ We are detaining you,” Heather said, at length, to Mr. Stewart; who remarked, as he bade her “ Good-bye,” that he also was going to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and should probably arrive there first.

Then she turned and looked for Mr. Croft, who, unable longer to avoid the situation, now came forward, and assisted her into a cab.

As he did so, Alick, with a sudden amazement, recognised him.

“ Who is that gentleman?” he asked Heather; while the object of this inquiry followed Mr. Stewart into a hansom, which immediately drove off.

“ Mr. Croft—Mr. Douglas Aymescourt Croft. Why? Do you know him; have you ever seen him before?”

“ I think I have once,” Alick answered, remembering for certain he had met that same individual

me, I cannot tell, only I know she has some good reason for her silence ; and I would rather not talk about her any more, or, perhaps, like Lally, I shall begin to be foolish and cry too." An explanation necessitated by the fact that Mrs. Dudley was crying partly because of her child's grief, and partly because she never could speak of Bessie without a feeling of bitter sorrow.

After that there fell a sudden silence on the party, during the continuance of which Heather employed herself in adjusting Master Leonard's collar, which was crooked to an unimaginable extent ; Mr. Stewart read the newspaper ; Lucy looked at Heather ; and Mr. Croft, his chin resting on Lally's head, gazed out of the window, his thoughts wandering the while miles, and miles away.

"Do you expect Mr. Dudley to meet you ?" asked Mr. Stewart, when the train had passed New Cross, and was speeding on through Bermondsey.

"No," Heather answered ; "but his brother will be at the station."

"Oh ! he has brothers."

"Two," Heather explained ; and a few minutes

afterwards she was introducing Alick to Mr. Stewart, who looked on him not ungraciously, while Mr. Croft stood a little apart, apparently by no means desirous of making Mr. Alexander Dudley’s acquaintance.

“ We are detaining you,” Heather said, at length, to Mr. Stewart; who remarked, as he bade her “ Good-bye,” that he also was going to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and should probably arrive there first.

Then she turned and looked for Mr. Croft, who, unable longer to avoid the situation, now came forward, and assisted her into a cab.

As he did so, Alick, with a sudden amazement, recognised him.

“ Who is that gentleman?” he asked Heather; while the object of this inquiry followed Mr. Stewart into a hansom, which immediately drove off.

“ Mr. Croft—Mr. Douglas Aymescourt Croft. Why? Do you know him; have you ever seen him before?”

“ I think I have once,” Alick answered, remembering for certain he had met that same individual

of the *Times* would insert his letter, and thus give him (Lord Kemms) an opportunity of setting himself right with the general public."

This letter was written after a somewhat stormy interview with Arthur Dudley and Mr. Black, and despatched to the *Times*' office hours before Mr. Stewart's arrival in town. When that gentleman, after touching *en route* at the offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, did reach Lord Kemms' town house, he was informed his Lordship had left for Kemms Park by the 5.8 express.

On receiving this intelligence, Mr. Stewart and his nephew drove straight to King's Cross, where they caught the 7.15 to Palinsbridge, from which place they proceeded in a fly, procured at the Plough Hotel, to Kemms' Park.

Arrived there, between ten and eleven o'clock at night, Mr. Stewart bade the driver wait; and then, following the butler, who stared to see visitors at such an hour, was ushered into the drawing-room, where were seated Miss Augusta Baldwin, Lord Kemms, and Mr. Compton Raidsford.

"If I were inclined to quote Mr. Black," remarked Mr. Stewart, after exchanging greetings with his

relations, "I should say, here we drop upon the conspirators. Now, Frank, what is all this about you and our Company? Nice dance you have led me over it! Why could you not have stopped in town till you had seen some of us, as any other human being would, I think, excepting yourself?"

"Mr. Raidsford had kindly promised to dine with me to-day."

"Very good of Mr. Raidsford," answered Mr. Stewart, with a look towards that gentleman, which seemed to say "I know all about it;" "and I suppose you and Mr. Raidsford have been settling our concerns for us over your claret. We stand at opposite poles," he added, addressing the contractor; "there can be no doubt but that in some previous state of existence you were bitten by a company, and have had a kind of hydrophobic horror of Limited Liability ever since. Now, Frank, tell me all your grievances; what is this about your good name being taken from you?"

"It has been used without my authority," answered his Lordship. "I told Mr. Black distinctly I would have nothing to do with his venture, and after that he coolly went and put my name on the Direction."



"He quite understood, I think, that you had given your consent?"

"I beg your pardon: the last interview I ever had with Mr. Black, until to-day, was at Berrie Down, and I then told him nothing should induce me to lend my countenance to any undertaking of the kind."

"It was a pity Mr. Black did not take you at your word, Frank," said Mr. Douglas Croft; "we could have done without you."

"You will have to do without me now," retorted Lord Kemms. "I have written to the *Times* to say that my name was used without my authority."

"You are confoundedly touchy about your name, if Miss Baldwin will excuse my saying so," observed Mr. Stewart; which remark Miss Baldwin apparently took as a hint that the presence of ladies was undesired, for she rose and left the room, stating, with a gracious smile to Mr. Stewart, that she would not remain, and so prevent his saying whatever he liked. "I consider Frank has been very hasty," she added, glancing defiantly in the direction where Mr. Raidsford sat; "but I profess to know nothing of business."

"Then I wish, aunt, you would not interfere in

mine," answered Lord Kemms; "and, as for my name," he went on, addressing Mr. Stewart, "how should you like yours to be put on any board of direction without your authority?"

"I should not like it at all," replied his visitor "but still I should not think it necessary to go perfectly insane on the subject, as you appear to have done. Dudley tells me you stormed at Mr. Black to-day like a woman; that you would not listen to a word of explanation; and that you dashed out of the office without giving either of them an opportunity of even attempting to arrange the matter with you."

"Because Black had the audacity to tell me I did give him permission, and adhered to the statement. He first insinuated I was trying to back out of the affair, and then wished to know if some pecuniary compromise could not be effected. The insolent vagabond coolly told me, 'that was always the way with gentlemen,—that a merchant's word was as good as his bond, but that, unless you had everything with a swell (the expression he used) in black and white, there was no dependence to be placed upon how matters might turn out.'"

"Very foolish of Black to make such a speech," Mr. Stewart commented. "You must have put up his temper by some means, Frank."

"I made him confess he was a liar," said Lord Kemms.

"My dear fellow, how very vehement you are!" expostulated his kinsman; "you could not express your meaning more strongly if you were a costermonger!"

"I do not see why I should not employ the only word which thoroughly expresses my meaning, even though it be used by a costermonger also. Mr. Black stated that I allowed my name to be put on the Direction. I asked him when? He declared at the time we were staying at Berrie Down. I reminded him, that the last occasion on which we met in Hertfordshire was one day I called at the Hollow, when I told him, in Mr. Dudley's presence, I would have nothing to do with the Company. Then he said, he had made a mistake—it was when he saw me at my house in London. I told him he had never seen me at my house in London—that, at the time he inquired there for me, I was in Paris. Then he declared it must have been at Palinsbridge

station ; at any rate, he knew I had promised to let him have my name, and that it was too absurd for me, after having seen myself advertised for twelve months, to try to repudiate connection with the 'Protector' now."

"And he was quite right there," observed Mr. Stewart.

"I regret to differ from you," here put in Mr. Raidsford ; "but I cannot agree with that opinion."

Mr. Stewart looked over at the speaker with an expression which seemed to say, that it was a matter of supreme indifference to him whether Mr. Raidsford agreed or not, but still he condescended to explain that "Lord Kemms had suffered judgment to go by default."

"Mr. Black's very remark !" said Lord Kemms. "He drew his shoulders up to his ears, and stuffed his hands under the waistband of his trousers ——"

"Really, Frank, you are needlessly descriptive," expostulated Mr. Stewart.

"And said," proceeded Lord Kemms, unheeding the interruption, "you know, my Lord, it is of no sort of manner of use your kicking up an infernal row about the matter now. You have suffered

judgment to go by default; and whether you intended your name to be on our board or not, cannot make any difference at this time of day; so you had better let us come to some arrangement. Speaking on behalf of the other directors, I am certain the Company will do what it can to meet your views."

"Could a man have spoken any fairer than that?" inquired Mr. Stewart.

"Fairer! I never heard anything so perfectly cool and impertinent in my life!" exclaimed Lord Kemms. "First, to use my name, and then dare to say, 'I need not try to set myself right with the public!'"

"What do you suppose the public cares about the affair?" asked Mr. Croft. "To whom, do you imagine, it signifies in the least whether your name is on the Direction or not?"

"It signifies to me," replied his Lordship.

"Why?" demanded Mr. Stewart.

"Because I do not choose to be mixed up with speculations of the kind; because I refused to be associated with your Company; because I won't be overreached in this way; because other names may have been used in the same manner, and it is time

promoters were taught such liberties cannot be taken with impunity."

"Our Company is a good one—paying very good dividends, and you have risked no money in it," suggested Mr. Croft.

"Your Company may be a good one, or it may not," replied Lord Kemms; "but, good or bad, I won't be mixed up with it. I will have nothing to do with adventures or speculations of any kind."

"It is a pity you were not always so particular concerning the things you connected yourself with, Frank," remarked his cousin.

"Let by-gones be by-gones, Douglas," interposed Mr. Stewart, hastily; "because a man sees the folly of his ways now, there is no justice in twitting him with having been less far-sighted formerly. No doubt, Frank is right as to the general principle; but this is rather a special case, with some peculiarities about it, which he will, doubtless, take into consideration. In the first place," he added, addressing Lord Kemms, "we will admit there has been some misunderstanding on the subject——"

"No," was the reply, "I will admit nothing of the kind. Black understood me perfectly——"

“ Well, granting that he did understand you, what particular harm has his use of your name done ? It is associated not with obscure Cockneys or swindlers, but with decently - respectable, solvent men, like Douglas and myself, for example. Of course, we know, we are not lords ; but still, we have a fancy we are honest, and possess some money. Our venture is turning out very well. No doubt the proper number of shares has been allotted to you. You take no responsibility—you run no risk ; by making a fuss over the affair, you will do yourself no good, and may do us considerable harm. You will take time to think over the matter, and you will, when you have cooled down a little, decide to make no public scandal concerning the affair.”

“ I have already written to the *Times*,” answered his Lordship.

“ But not posted the letter, I hope. Bring it here, Frank, and we will smoke a calumet of peace over its ashes.”

“ Impossible ! I sent it to the *Times*’ office before I left London.”

“ If we had known that, we might have saved

ourselves this agreeable journey," said Mr. Croft ; while Mr. Stewart observed :

"Well, Frank, all I can say is, I am very sorry ; for now we shall have to fight you as best we can. Once in the *Times*, it is war to the death, you know."

"It was not I who sought the war," answered Lord Kemms.

"After waiting nearly twelve months, you might surely have waited another day."

"It was only yesterday I knew anything about the matter. I happened to be over at the Hollow with my aunt, and on the drawing-room table I saw one of the 'Protector' prospectuses. Glancing at it, I knew for the first time the use Black had made of my name."

"It is singular your friend, Mr. Raidsford, did not communicate the fact to you before," observed Mr. Stewart, with a slight sneer.

"There has been a coolness between me and Lord Kemms for some time past," interposed Mr. Raidsford, "originating in this very affair. Lord Kemms assured me he would have nothing to do with your Company ; and when, after that assurance, I saw



his name amongst the directors, I confess I felt both surprised and nettled."

"And pray, sir, if the question be not indiscreet, what interest was it of yours whether Lord Kemms became a director of our Company or not?"

"It was no personal interest of mine," answered the contractor; "but believing, as I do, such companies to be the curse of commerce—the very death of legitimate trade—when I am asked for my poor opinion, I do not hesitate about expressing it."

"You consider capital, then, which employs labour, which builds bridges, constructs railways, digs canals, sends out vessels, the death of legitimate trade?" inquired Mr. Stewart.

"Capital, no," was the reply; "companies, yes—at least, limited liability companies."

"And yet the idea of the man who brought in, and the majority which passed, the Limited Liability Act, was, that, so far from killing trade, it would foster and encourage commerce."

"So we may conclude, or else it would never have become law," was the reply.

"Trade has always been crippled for want of capital," remarked Mr. Croft.

“And trade always will be,” answered Mr. Raidsford ; “it is in the nature of trade to find whatever capital it may have insufficient. In precise proportion to the extent of his business are a man’s outstanding debts ; consequently, the larger his business is, the greater are the number of his debtors. His capital, in fact, goes into his books ; and instead of so much in the bank, he has so many hundreds of people owing him money.”

“The idea of limited liability was to enable a man to put a certain sum of money into a business, and have no further responsibility,” said Mr. Stewart.

“Any man could have compassed the same object by *lending* money into a business,” replied Mr. Raidsford ; “since the usury laws were repealed, he might have taken what percentage he pleased, and run no more risk than he does under the Limited Liability Act ; but the real mischief of the present system, to my mind, is, not that large capitalists are thereby enabled to advance money to small working men, but that the large capitalists are thereby enabled to combine together, and crush the small working men. Precisely as you are doing at present : you are ruining hundreds of respectable tradesmen, and when

your crash comes, as come it will, those men will not be benefited thereby; they have lost their capital, small or great, as the case may be, and must content themselves with situations for the remainder of their lives."

"You are extremely kind to prophesy such a pleasant future for the Protector," said Mr. Croft.

"Where there are many masters, there are bad servants," was the reply; "at least, such is my opinion. My notion is, indeed, that in a company there is no master at all; there is no one person whose business and interest it is to see that things are properly and economically conducted."

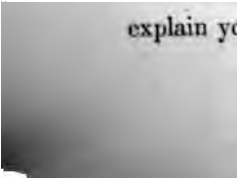
"We have our manager," suggested Mr. Stewart.

"You have an admirably efficient manager at your works now, I do not doubt," said Mr. Raidsford.

"What do you mean by that remark?" asked Mr. Stewart.

"Simply, that I should not give Mr. Crossenham sixpence a week for managing any concern of mine; but, without question, he is perfectly competent to fill the position he occupies with you."

"Once again, Mr. Raidsford, I must ask you to explain your meaning?"



"Then, Mr. Stewart, you certainly will ask in vain," was the reply. "When, eight months since, we met in Moorgate Street, you did me the honour of asking my opinion about this Company,—and I gave you that opinion to the best of my ability,—what was your course of action? You certainly got rid of Bayley Crossenham, but you put in his shoes a man utterly incompetent to manage even his own business, how much less yours; a man, who, though perfectly honest himself, could never detect dishonesty in others. I asked you then, if Lord Kemms' name had been really added to the Direction by his authority? and it is now evident you took no steps to ascertain the truth of the matter. I counselled you to be exceedingly wary in dealing with Mr. Black, and yet Mr. Black is now virtually master of the 'Protector,' as he is of every other company with which he is connected."

"He is not master of the 'Protector,'" answered Mr. Stewart.

"He must be master of its funds, or he never could have such an amount of money to spend, as is the case at present," was the reply.

"He is no such thing," repeated Mr. Stewart.

“ I am happy to hear it, for the sake of the shareholders,” answered Mr. Raidsford, coolly ; “ and that brings me to another phase of limited liability, viz., that this boasted union of capitalists, of which we hear so much, is, in many cases, neither more nor less than the accumulation of five and ten pounds scraped from the savings of the lower middle class ; the money of people who, deluded by specious advertisements and good names, send up their post-office orders and receive their shares, and lose their cash, and thereby afford a living to a class of men who otherwise would be exercising their talents in some very different mode indeed from that of ‘ promoting ’ public companies.”

“ What a pity you do not go into Parliament, and favour the nation with an exposition of your views !” said Mr. Stewart.

“ I should not be the first man to advance them,” was the reply. “ In both Houses somewhat similar opinions have been expressed before now ; of course, my views may be wrong——”

“ You do not mean, Mr. Raidsford, that you have ever contemplated such a possibility ?” interrupted Mr. Stewart.

"Yes, I have," was the reply; "contemplated, much more closely, the pros and cons of limited liability, than you have the Protector's chances of ultimate success. The system is rotten, Mr. Stewart, and you and such men as you, who derive profit from these ventures without incurring one halfpenny of risk, ought to be the first to confess that it is so."

"I have two thousand shares in the Protector Bread Company on my own risk, at all events," said Mr. Stewart.

"I am delighted to hear it, in one way," answered Mr. Raidsford; "delighted, because it proves you to be a thoroughly honest man; but sorry, because if anything do go wrong with the Company, your loss will be considerable."

"But I am determined nothing shall go wrong with the Company."

"In that case, doubtless you devote a considerable amount of attention to the mills!"

"Mr. Raidsford, have you any specific charge to make against our manager?"

"If I had," was the reply, "I should go before the board and prefer it. I make no charge, but I

recommend caution. I was right about Lord Kemms, you perceive."

"We do not admit that," broke in Douglas Croft; "we are his opponents now, and must fight the matter out with him."

"Or, rather, Mr. Black must," added Mr. Stewart. "He got us into this scrape, and he must get us out of it; so, remember, Frank, you are in for a paper war with one of the shrewdest men I know; you and Mr. Raidsford will have to muster your forces so as to come out of the struggle with *éclat*. I am sorry it has so happened, I must confess; sorry that Lord Kemms has been—I am obliged to use a harsh word, Mr. Raidsford—so ill-advised. With the best intentions, I feel confident, you have counselled him to hurry into print (a course always to be avoided, if possible), but still, you have led him wrong. Had you left the matter in my hands, Frank," he added, "I should myself have stated publicly that there had been some misunderstanding, and so withdrawn your name, without any fuss or anger. As it is—why it is—and there is no use in further discussion. We must now do the best we can for ourselves," and Mr. Stewart rose to depart.

“You are not thinking of going to-night?” exclaimed Lord Kemms, in astonishment; “because we differ in opinion, we are not, I trust, to swear eternal enmity.”

“Not with my good-will,” replied Mr. Stewart; “but because we have differed in opinion, I must get back to town by the first train to-morrow morning. Had your letter to the *Times* not been despatched I would gladly have remained here, instead of returning to Palinsbridge to-night; but needs must, you know; and you, Frank, are our driver.”

“I am sorry for it, extremely sorry!” exclaimed Lord Kemms.

“Sorry for having appealed to the god of English breakfast-tables?” asked Mr. Stewart. “Come, I am glad to see some signs of repentance about you.”

“I did not mean that; I am not sorry for having written and despatched my letter, I only regret that there should be any necessity for you to drive back to Palinsbridge to-night. But, at least, you will have something to eat before you start?”

“It appears to me we ought not to break bread under your roof,” said his cousin; “but, considering we have had nothing since we left Hastings, ten



hours since, except a glass of sherry and seltzer water at Palinsbridge, I think it would be carrying animosity farther than human nature could endure, to refuse your obliging though tardy offer."

"For my part, I shall be very glad to accept it," declared Mr. Stewart; "worry always gives me an appetite; and I should not care to be dependent on the good offices of mine landlord at the Plough, for supper. His seltzer water was as hot as though drawn from one of the Geyser springs. And will you let some of your people tell the fellow, who brought us over, to give that poor devil of a horse of his a feed? Nice creature it is; trots about three miles an hour!"

"Will you allow my man to drive you back, Mr. Stewart?" said the contractor. "I shall be very happy if you will make use of my carriage."

"Thank you, no," was the reply; "the fly must return, and so Douglas and I may as well go in it. We are not exactly like man and wife, apt to quarrel by the way. If he were my better half, I would accept your offer at once; as it is, we will return as we came—much obliged, nevertheless."

Then Mr. Raidsford thought he must return home.

“Good-night,” said Mr. Stewart; “though your views differ from mine, I do not say but there is much truth in them. That is the worst of our imperfect state of existence, there is truth in everything.”

“Even in a promoter,” suggested Douglas Croft; and then the three shook hands with Mr. Raidsford, who drove back to Moorlands thinking to himself—

“These great people are very curious individuals. If three men in my own rank of life had come together under such circumstances, there would have been hard words used, and a quarrel to a certainty. Is it that they are not in earnest, or is it civilization? One hears a great deal about civilization; is this one of its fruits?” and thus pondering, Mr. Raidsford returned home to the wife of his bosom, who, back from Hastings, was conducting her household on principles which seemed to the servants the reverse either of Christian or civilized.

Perhaps this fact made the amicable warfare at Kemms Park seem all the more astonishing to the contractor, who had many things still to learn, though he was so clever about business and business matters.

"If that be the way gentlemen quarrel," he thought, "I cannot wonder at their looking down on us ; I wonder now what they are thinking about me ?"

Had a little bird of the air carried what the trio were saying about him to Mr. Raidsford, he need not have covered his face and shut his eyes.

"Spite of his crotchets I really like Raidsford," remarked Mr. Croft. "What do you suppose he meant, uncle, when he spoke about the Company failing ?"

"He meant," answered Mr. Stewart, "what I have often suspected myself,—that Black is too great a rogue to be honest, even if honesty be to his interest. Raidsford is a well-intentioned fellow, but he has not much information outside his business. Still, his ideas are worth consideration, and I shall consider them, and look up Mr. Crossenham," added Mr. Stewart in a lower tone, as he went downstairs to the dining-room, where a substantial supper was already spread.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE PAPER WAR.

THE eight o'clock up express only stopped once between Palinsbridge and Holloway; but on the occasion of that one pause, Mr. Stewart procured a copy of the morning's *Times*, where, occupying a prominent position, he found Lord Kemms' letter.

"It is a mercy Frank is a Lord," remarked Mr. Croft, drily; "for I do not think he would ever have got through the world in a subordinate capacity. The longer I live, the more satisfied I feel Providence orders these things a vast deal better than we could do."

"You think, I suppose, Providence made him a Lord on the same principle as it makes so many poor men inventors. If an individual have not five pounds

in the world, he has a patent—the compensating balance—is that what you mean, Douglas?”

“Something of that kind,” answered his nephew. “I have often wondered how Frank would have pushed his way had he been turned adrift at ten years of age with half-a-crown in his pocket; one cannot marvel at men like Raidsford being a little elated at the contemplation of their own exploits, when one thinks of how few people there really are in the world with any brains at all. Now, unprincipled though he may be, can you help admiring Black? I confess, I have the very highest opinion possible of that honest individual’s talent.”

“Much the same sort of talent as pickpockets and burglars are made of,” answered Mr. Stewart.

“Oh! you are wrong there,” was the reply; “decidedly wrong; Black’s is an administrative genius, mental—not physical. The pickpocket’s cleverness is merely highly-cultivated manual dexterity, the same kind of thing that makes some women clever at fancy work, at crochet, and netting, and those fearful groups of flowers executed in Berlin wool, which my Arabella’s soul delights in. A burglar, again, is merely an advanced mechanic, but Black’s

genius is of a very different order. He has ability to conceive and impudence to execute; he has an immense faculty of organization; he would have made a good Chancellor of the Exchequer, I fancy; his resources are inexhaustible; his power of construction enormous. No undertaking is too large for him to fear carrying through. He puts me often in mind of those fellows at the Circus, who can ride four horses at once. He could manage fifty companies. I often think, when I am talking to Black, about what judges sometimes say to criminals, namely, that it is a pity to see such talents applied to such purposes; in another walk of life, Black's genius ought to have carried him to eminence."

"Don't waste your regrets upon such an arrant humbug," Mr. Stewart replied. "Nature has fitted him into the only hole he could by possibility have filled. Black's genius is a lying genius. Had it been clothed by circumstances decently, externally apparelled with honesty, and virtue and truth, it would soon have got rid of those incumbrances, and come forth in its primitive nakedness. I tell you Black has no talent, save for dishonesty; if that devil were cast out of him, he would be strong no longer. As

Samson's strength lay in his hair, so Black's lies in his falsehood, his cunning, his impudence, and his plausibility. Take these things from him and he would be but as other ordinary men; honest, perhaps, but weak; able to earn a living, but certainly not to make a fortune. It is quite a mistake to imagine because a man is clever in one walk, he could be clever if he pleased in another. The walk is dictated by his particular cleverness, and Black's talent, as I said before, is lying.

"Yet he professes to be weary of planning, and scheming, and uncertainty——"

"And very possibly that profession is true. A man may be weary of the devil which possesses him, even though he be unable to get rid of it. At one time, I confess, I thought Black was going to turn over a new leaf, and content himself with the fine things the Protector had in store for him, but now I fear the old Adam is too strong in Black ever to give him a chance of turning from the evil of his former ways, and I am satisfied if he can ruin our Company he will do it somehow. This business of Kemms' is bad too. How many shares have you, Douglas, besides your qualification?"

"Five hundred," was the reply; "and I shall give my broker instructions to sell them."

"You do not mean that?"

"Indeed I do; I have no intention of losing sixpence, if I can help it. I have never lost money by a company yet, and I do not purpose beginning now."

"But it is so confoundedly mean to desert a failing cause."

"I never made any pretension to Quixotism. The moment Frank said he had written to the *Times*, I made up my mind to sell; and, if you were wise, you would sell also."

"No; I shall not adopt that course," said Mr. Stewart; but he did not tell his nephew what course he intended to adopt.

"It will be a bad business for Dudley, if anything should go wrong with the Protector," remarked Mr. Croft, after an uncomfortable pause. "He has mortgaged Berrie Down."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Mr. Stewart.

"Surely yes," was the reply. "Old Craddock has advanced five thousand pounds upon it at four and a half—good interest too, I call that, on security good as the Bank of England."



"I wish I had heard of it."

"So do I," was the reply; "but my lawyer knew nothing about the matter till it was all settled."

"What did he want the money for; do you know?"

"Bills, I understand; and that the sum I have mentioned will not meet the one-half of those he has out. 'Pon my honour, I am very sorry for Dudley. He will be a beggar before he is ten years older."

"He is an awful fool," observed Mr. Stewart.

"So he may be; but folly is not a sin, is it?"

"It is sin's half-brother, or whole father, or something of the kind, at any rate," retorted Mr. Stewart; "but here is King's Cross, and now for Mr. Black," and so saying the old man sprang as lightly from the compartment as his much younger companion; and, bustling out of the station, hailed a cab, which speedily conveyed the pair to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"Where Mr. Black had already been," Arthur informed them. "He is gone on to Dowgate Hill, where, he told me, any message would find him until one o'clock. Shall I send and ask him to come up?"

"No," Mr. Stewart decided; "we will follow him."

"I saw Lord Kemms' letter in this morning's *Times*," Arthur remarked.

"Yes; his Lordship ought to have a straight waistcoat, and bread-and-water diet for a week, to teach him not to be so hasty," answered Mr. Stewart. "Black must answer him."

"He said, he hoped you would leave him to do so," Arthur replied. "He does not seem to attach much importance to the matter."

"Does he not? I wish I could think it of no consequence," replied Mr. Stewart. "Now, Douglas, are you ready?" and he again bustled out, and seated himself in the hansom which had waited for them.

"Mr. Croft!" it was Arthur, who, following the younger man out, spoke now in a lowered tone of voice, "do you think this will affect the Company?"

"There is no telling," the other answered; "only, if you have many shares, take my advice and get rid of them—quietly, you know, quietly."

"What was Dudley saying to you?" Mr. Stewart inquired as they drove off in the direction of the City.

"Asking me how this would affect the Protector, and I advised him to sell his shares."

"He has not a share beyond those Black gave him. A couple of hundred, paid-up."

"Then, what has he done with all the money for which Berrie Down is mortgaged and to be mortgaged?"

"God knows! given it to Black, most probably."

"Then he is virtually a ruined man."

"Time will show," answered Mr. Stewart, philosophically. "I do not think he will get much back from Black, at all events."

"Those are the kind of men, then, Raidsford had in his mind, when he was speaking about companies last night."

"Likely enough; but there were idiots in the world before Limited Liability was thought of, and there will be idiots in the world when Limited Liability is no more."

"Still, it does seem hard."

"That if a man will rush into the flame he should be burnt. Do you propose, Douglas, constituting yourself a species of knight-errant to rescue distressed gentlemen from the consequences of their

folly? You could never prevent a man like Dudley getting into trouble. By right, he was Black's natural prey, natural and legitimate. You do not quarrel with a cat for catching a mouse; why should you bemoan Dudley losing his money to Black?"

"I pity his wife."

"Ah! there I go with you; but she followed her fancy in marrying him, and she must pay for the indulgence of her fancy sooner or later. The best thing which could happen for her ultimate happiness would be for her husband to get a thorough sickening of following his own courses. I consider him one of the most conceited prigs I ever met. He won't take a hint from me on any subject."

"On what sort of subject?" inquired Mr. Croft, a little curiously.

"Why, you know he might learn a little of business, fit himself for some more lucrative post, but the moment I mentioned my idea he was up like a rocket. 'He did not intend to retain the secretaryship an hour longer than he could advantageously dispose of his shares. If I imagined he was going to remain at the beck and call of every one who liked

to call and beckon, I never was more mistaken in my life.' Whereupon," added Mr. Stewart, "I, of course, humbly apologised; and remarked that I had certainly been under the delusion he wished to add to his income, but I was happy to find I had been mistaken; because, from my own limited experience of the expenses of living in London, I felt satisfied he could not long afford to live at the rate he was doing on a thousand a year."

"Was not that a little——"

"Impertinent, you would say," finished Mr. Stewart, as his nephew paused; "that is precisely what I remarked to you a few moments since—knight-errantry in the nineteenth century is always impertinent; but still, if one sees a man walking straight on to the brink of a precipice, involuntarily one shouts out a warning to him. That is what I did—and that is what I got for my pains. Now, Mr. Dudley may go to the devil, for any trouble I shall take to prevent his travelling that easy road."

"But his wife, and the children?"

"One of the children will happily never need a marriage portion," returned Mr. Stewart, "and the

other is a boy. As for Mrs. Dudley, we have talked that over before ; and, speaking of her, Douglas, may I inquire the reason of the special interest you seem to feel about her ? A charming lady, doubtless, but still, a recent acquaintance. You are not in love with her, I hope ?”

“No,” Douglas Croft answered, “I do not love her.”

“What is the link, then ? for a link of some kind there must be.”

“Perhaps that my wife dislikes her,” suggested Mr. Croft ; then he added, in a different tone : “I have been a stupid ass and an awful sinner—that is the reason I like Mrs. Dudley.”

“Complimentary to Mrs. Dudley.”

“True, nevertheless,” answered Mr. Croft ; and at this moment they arrived at Mr. Black’s offices in Dowgate Hill, where they found that gentleman thoroughly enjoying himself.

“So you are really going to leave his Lordship in my hands for execution ?” he said, when Mr. Stewart had explained the purpose of their visit. “I am delighted to hear it, for I was just sketching out a letter in answer to his. May I read it to you ?”

"No," answered Mr. Stewart, "I do not wish to be mixed up with it in any way. The matter rests between you and Lord Kemms, and we must decline all interference. Fight it out yourselves. Whether the letter ought to be answered at all, until after the next board-day, is a question for you to decide."

"I will take that responsibility on my own shoulders," remarked Mr. Black. "Of course, all this is Mr. Raidsford's doing, not Lord Kemms'. I only wish it was Raidsford I had to answer, I would give him a dose that ought to cure him of meddling for a while again."

"Could you not publish the formula?" asked Mr. Croft; "it might be useful to the general public."

"There are some medicines the success of which depends as much on the person who administers them as on the drugs they actually contain," laughed Mr. Black; "and I don't think my physic would do Mr. Raidsford much good, unless I gave it to him with my own hands. Meddling humbug! what the deuce does he know about companies?"

"I suppose it is true concerning things as well as people—that we generally dislike that which we do not know," said Mr. Stewart.

“And a vast number of both things and people that we do,” added Mr. Black. Shortly after which speech his visitors took their departure, leaving him to finish his letter at his leisure.

Next day it appeared in the *Times*, and ran to the following effect:—

“SIR,—In the *Times* of to-day I see (unlike his Lordship, I read the papers) that Lord Kemms wishing, for some inscrutable reason, to ‘set himself straight with the general public,’ repudiates all connection with the Protector Bread and Flour Company (Limited). How such repudiation is to effect the difficult task Lord Kemms has set himself, he, perhaps, can explain; but as his letter is calculated to injure our credit, I beg leave to state, first—

“That Lord Kemms distinctly gave me permission to place his name on our Direction.

“Secondly. That the terms on which his name was to appear were fully settled between us.

“Thirdly. That the list of directors was published in almost every respectable paper throughout the kingdom, and daily for some weeks in the *Times*;



and that, consequently, Lord Kemms must have been perfectly well aware his name was placed on the Direction.

“Fourthly. That Lord Kemms gave no opportunity, either to myself or our secretary, Mr. Dudley, of entering into the slightest explanation on the subject. He called at the offices of the Company, in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, but only for the purpose, apparently, of indulging in a monologue, since, when Mr. Dudley and I endeavoured to utter a few words concerning the question in dispute, he indignantly rushed out of the secretary’s room, declaring he should write to the *Times*. Under the unfortunate impression that the matter can have the slightest interest for the general public, he has carried out his threat, and I am therefore compelled to request the insertion of this letter.

“I have not the remotest idea of the source of Lord Kemms’ irritation, and can only say, that nothing could be farther from the intention of any person connected with the Company than to give his Lordship the least cause of offence.

“Your obedient Servant,

“Sept., 18—

“PETER BLACK.”

Next day but one appeared another letter from Lord Kemms, stating that every "fact" contained in Mr. Black's letter was untrue—that he had never given permission for his name to be published—that he had never known it was so published, until some time after his return from the Continent, when he happened to meet with a prospectus of the "Protector Bread and Flour Company (Limited)," and then for the first time became aware of the use which had been made of his name. He considered that in the interests of the general public, he was bound openly to state the nature of the fraud which had been practised. He pointed confidently for authentication of his statement, if authentication were necessary, to the fact of his never having been registered even as a shareholder; and he declared he had given both Mr. Dudley and Mr. Black ample opportunity of explaining the line of conduct which had been pursued.

This epistle immediately elicited two in reply: one from Arthur Dudley, to the effect that Lord Kemms was mistaken in imagining he had afforded an opportunity either for discussion or explanation. "Not," added Arthur, "that it would have been in

my power to give his Lordship any information on the subject, as I am in utter ignorance of the facts of the case ; but, had this been otherwise, I should still have failed to obtain a hearing."

Mr. Black followed suit by remarking, that a nobleman who could consider seeing a prospectus "having his attention called," might reasonably be supposed ignorant of the true meaning of words, and through the whole of his letter gave his Lordship the benefit of this doubt. Mr. Black stated that though shares had been duly allotted, whilst Lord Kemms was abroad, registration of course was difficult ; that his name, failing the legal qualifications, had remained on the Direction as a matter of courtesy, since, having failed to take any steps to constitute himself a director, by attendance or otherwise, the business of the Company had been conducted without his presence or concurrence, to which circumstance, Mr. Black adroitly more than hinted, Lord Kemms's ill-humour was attributable.

To these letters Lord Kemms replied in a singularly confused epistle, which branched off from the question really at issue, to vague statements concerning companies in general, and limited liability

in particular. Mr. Raidsford being a much cleverer contractor than author, really did his Lordship an immense deal of mischief over these letters, and, although the editor of the *Times* kindly spared the owner of Kemms Park nearly a column of small type, and stated at the foot, "we can insert no more letters on this subject," thus leaving the ball with his Lordship, still that general public, with which Lord Kemms had been so eagerly anxious to set himself right, was greatly divided in opinion, and vexed in spirit as to who was to blame—whether Lord Kemms, or Mr. Black, or both, or neither.

To settle the matter, there ensued a most voluminous correspondence between the pair—a correspondence which, unrestricted by any fear of the *Times'* editor, swelled out to sheet after sheet of letter-paper closely written.

A few copies of that correspondence, printed at the time for general circulation, and freely advertised in the *Times*, are still extant, and may be perused by the curious in such matters, when down for a month at the seashore, or recovering from serious illness, or at any other peculiarly leisure period.

The pamphlet was to be had gratis at the

Company's offices, Lincoln's Inn Fields ; it was forwarded free by post to all parts of England ; it was made the subject of newspaper comment and private criticism, until, in absolute despair, Lord Kemms cursed the Protector, and Mr. Black, and all his own kindred, and, under the shades of his ancestral trees, vowed a vow that the next time he rushed into print he might be pilloried, and pelted with eggs, and bespattered with mud and dirt, as had been the case latterly.

But he stuck to his point ; and, although right is not always might, in the hands even of a nobleman, still Lord Kemms may have been pronounced the victor, insomuch as he contrived to do the Protector a vast deal of injury ; to shake the Company to its very foundation ; to create an enormous amount of alarm amongst the shareholders ; and to cause the directors much perplexity and annoyance.

After all, a company is very like a woman ; once blown upon, its credit is worth but little from that time forth for ever. It may demean itself with the extremest propriety ; under circumstances of temptation it may remain honest and fair dealing, it may struggle for a livelihood, and earn one in the

properest manner possible ; and yet, when all these things are placed to the credit side of the account, they shall not outweigh the damning fact that a shadow once fell over it ; that it was “ talked about ; ” that there were diversities of opinion as to its conduct ; that there were doubts expressed as to its perfect and immaculate purity.

Thus, at any rate, affairs turned out with the Protector. By a curious feminine logic, ladies discovered that the quality of the Company’s bread was affected by the newspaper correspondence.

Heaven knows ! perhaps the fair creatures were weary of waging an unprofitable war with their servants—those real chiefs of London households ; perhaps the entreaties—very humble and servile—of Markby, round the corner, carried due weight with the so-called mistresses of town mansions and suburban villas ; perhaps the “ cash down ” principles of the Company were too strict to suit the laxer views of people who had been accustomed to the greater freedom of a “ six months’ run ; ” perhaps—but why go on multiplying suppositions, when the actual result is all which need be stated ?—customers fell off in abundance ; week after week a smaller

quantity of bread required to be baked, a more limited supply of flour was demanded; till at length the directors began to look gloomily in each other's faces, and inquire "what business was coming to." The shares also decreased in value, and by the time another half year came round, things had begun to look, as Mr. Black declared, "very blue."

As for Arthur Dudley, he had reluctantly renewed those bills, for which Mr. Black was, he considered, responsible, once again, and paid off the others out of the money raised on Berrie Down.

He did not, so he conceived, owe a sixpence in the world, and he had the property in Lincoln's Inn, his furniture and his salary, but still things were "looking blue" with him also. When he came to cast up his year's expenditure, he discovered a thousand pounds would nothing like see him through it.

He was an honest man, as I have said before, but he had gone on spending—spending—without a thought of how all this spending was to be provided for, until the gradual depreciation of the Protector's shares roused him from his dream of security, and compelled him to look his position in the face.

Then he realised to himself for the first time, how much easier it is to be economical in the country than in London; how much less chance there is of a person living beyond his income amidst green fields than amongst bricks and mortar. At Berrie Down, he could have accounted for every sixpence; in town, all he could clearly determine was that the money had gone—where it was gone he might have defied a conjuror accurately to tell.

Cabs here; expenses there; a luncheon with so-and-so, a dinner with some one else; a picnic at Bushey; Heather's visit to Hastings; fees to Dr. Chickton. It was but a guinea now, and ten pounds again, and half a sovereign on such a date; and yet, these items mounted up.

There are only ten hundred single pounds in a thousand a year, and a five-pound note Arthur knew had often not covered his daily expenditure.

If he dare have told Heather then—if he only dare have left that miserable office of his, where he kept poring over bills and cursing impatient creditors—it would have been a comfort to the man; but there had arisen a coolness between him and Heather of late. She was either jealous or exact-



ing—perhaps both; she objected, not by words, which he might have combated, but by manner to his excessive intimacy with Mrs. Croft.

And it was so perfectly ridiculous! jealousy in the matter was so utterly uncalled for! There was nothing wrong in his friendship for Mrs. Croft—nothing; therefore ill-humour, even dissatisfaction, was quite unreasonable.

If he had given his wife cause for anger, Arthur could have understood her antagonism—but without cause? Just as though a flirtation were not fifty times harder to endure patiently than a *liaison*; as though the external caution which the latter demands were not preferable to the flaunting boldness of that virtue which fearlessly laughs aloud while looking down into the very pit of Vice.

Sin does not, as a rule, voluntarily walk on the same pavement with injured wives, staring them out of countenance; sin does not come to a woman's house, dressed out in the extreme of the fashion, trailing its silks and satins over carpets which are trodden by the feet of sorrowful and neglected women.

There is something to be urged against sin! Injured husbands and wives have decidedly the best

of the argument when once the seventh commandment is broken and strange idols occupy the shrines which once were consecrated to the household deities ; but against flirtation conjugal jealousy is powerless : it can suspect all things, and confirm none ; it has no cause to bring openly, even into the domestic court ; it suffers and yet has no disease ; it feels the smart, yet can lay its hand on no open wound.

Flirtation is like a shadow : it follows you about, and still no man can lay a hand upon it ; it may dog your footsteps and disturb your peace, and yet, if complaint be made of it, you are assured it is only a fancy which is distressing you.

It is the person who complains in this case who is in fault, not the person who offends ; it is the exacting wife or jealous husband, not the foolish man, or forgetful woman, who is to blame if domestic unhappiness accrue from an over-appreciation of Mr. This, or Mrs. That.

What folly to strive to keep a husband eternally at home ! What absurdity to suppose a wife is never to speak civilly to a male acquaintance ! so the defence runs, while it is not thought necessary

even to keep the cause of offence discreetly in the background. The whole affair is so moral, so strictly proper, that it is never supposed possible dear John can grow weary of seeing Alonzo, nor Mary become tired of hearing Imogen's praises sounded.

There is no sin—of course not—and therefore, no harm being done, every one ought to be satisfied ; only when flirting Virtue becomes, as it does in such cases, brazen-faced, the question arises whether Sin, with averted head and downcast eyes, be not the easier vanquished opponent of the two.

At all events, without for a moment insinuating that Mrs. Douglas Croft was other than the most discreet of British matrons, it is open to doubt whether the most indiscreet of women could have given Heather Dudley one-half so many heart-aches as did that amiable and estimable wife.

Had Mrs. Dudley been wise and philosophic, she would doubtless have reflected that Arthur, never having been a peculiarly agreeable addition to the family circle, was quite as well out of it ; but then, Heather, being neither wise nor philosophic, fretted herself over her husband's defection till she almost lost her beauty. A great mistake !

She had loved this poor, weak husband, borne with him through the years, lightened his troubles, been obedient to his slightest wish, and this was the result ;—that he deserted her whenever the woman who had jilted him held up her finger to beckon him back ; that he forgot all his wife's faith, and truth, and tenderness, and remembered only he had once been attached to this handsome virago, whose preference flattered his vanity ; who felt pleased to have this old admirer following in her train.

Well ! Heather had long known she did not possess her husband's heart ; and if this were a fact, what could it matter to whom he gave it ?

Thus she strove to reason herself into contentment ; but a woman is not the most reasonable creature in existence where her affections are interested, and accordingly, perhaps, she was as Arthur decided, a little wayward and exacting ; a wife burdened at that time with many anxieties, amongst which, perhaps, the worst was—Lally.

For as the leaves fell, Lally had drooped, and now, when Christmas was at hand once again, the child drooped more and more.

There could be no question about the matter,  
VOL. III.

Lally was very ill indeed ; far more seriously ill than when twelve months previously Bessie had “kissed her to pieces” under the misletoe, and hung up holly branches over her bed.

## CHAPTER VI.

## FOR EVERMORE.

AFTER her return from Hastings, Heather lost no time in taking Lally and Mr. Stewart's letter to Mr. Rymner Henry.

That great man did not pay quite such devoted attention to his new patient as Doctor Chickton had considered necessary; on the contrary, Mrs. Dudley thought him a little negligent. He asked few questions; he did not "take much notice" of the child; he was a little stand-off and ceremonious; he was at no pains to win Lally's heart. He expressed no opinion on the case, and declined to say how long he thought it might be before she was well.

The proximate cause of her delicacy did not appear to interest him as it had done Dr. Chickton. As a narrative, Heather's story might have its

merits, so his manner seemed to imply ; but, in so far as it afforded the slightest assistance to his comprehension of the disease, she might have spared herself the trouble of repeating it.

He wrote a prescription, against his will, Heather imagined, and then he rose, signifying thereby that the interview was terminated.

“What do you think of her?” Mrs. Dudley ventured to inquire, as she laid the fee wrapped up like the curl of which Mr. Stewart had spoken, in a piece of note-paper on the table, guiltily, and as if she had committed a sin, “what do you think of her?”

“I should like to look at her again,” said Mr. Henry. “No, you need not bring her here ; I will call some day when I am in your neighbourhood. Have you seen Mr. Stewart lately?”

“Last week,” Heather answered.

“Was he quite well? Ah! glad to hear that; wonderful man; astonishing energy; wonderful—wonderful!” and, amidst these exclamations, Mr. Henry cleverly manœvred his visitors to the door of his consulting-room, where he consigned them to the care of an individual who, although he demeaned

himself like an archbishop, and looked like a master undertaker, was yet kind enough to see Mrs. Dudley into her cab, and tell the driver to return to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Before Heather expected him to do so, Mr. Rymner Henry called. In her drawing-room, he seemed a very different individual to the Mr. Henry who had been so stiff and so stand-off in his own domains.

He talked a good deal to Mrs. Dudley, and some amenities were exchanged between him and Lally, who preferred a petition on her own account against any more medicine, "for I am well now," she assured him, "better as well."

"What does she mean by that expression?" inquired Mr. Henry.

"Better than well, I imagine," Heather explained. "I do not know where she heard the phrase, but she adopted it during her first severe illness, and has since continued to use it."

"And you think you are too well to require medicine?" he added, addressing the child.

"Iss." Lally's speaking was still, as Mrs. Ormson declared, in a deplorably backward condition.



"But if you do not take the medicine I order, you may get ill again."

Lally turned this view of the question over in her mind, and then remarked, "it would be time enough to have the medicine when she did get ill again."

"Your mamma does not think so."

"But then ma has not to take it."

"Your mamma would not object to taking anything I ordered, if she thought that would cure her little girl,"—at which remark Heather held out her arms to Lally, and the mother and child went through one of those pantomimes which supply the place of all assurance, as they elude all description.

Inexpressibly touching, too, become such pantomimes when the spectator knows the time during which they can be repeated is but short; when he is quite well aware that the days are drawing near on which the child so loved, so idolized, must be laid in the arms of a colder and grimmer nurse to be caressed and hushed to sleep, and pressed close to her mother's breast, never more, ah! never.

And of this fact Mr. Henry was only too confident. The moment he looked in Lally's face, he knew for a certainty that which Mr. Stewart had

vaguely comprehended. The temporary improvement Heather talked of so thankfully, could not deceive his experience. He understood the nature of such varieties too well to be deceived by them; he knew Lally was doomed, and the bright sunny November day, spite of all its delusive light and glitter, could not blind him to the fact that winter was close at hand.

For which reason he wished Mr. Stewart had not sent Mrs. Dudley to him. He was not a man to delude with false hopes such as Dr. Chickton had held out, and yet to tell this fond, foolish mother that it was a mere question of time and cure, was beyond his ability.

To refuse to treat the hopeless case, to decline ordering vain remedies, would have been almost barbarous, when the poor creature apparently believed the very strength and might of her own love could save her darling from the grasp of a foe too terrible to mention.

"It will dawn upon her by degrees," the surgeon thought, "there is no need for me to tell her;" and so, after a few minutes' more conversation, he departed, utterly ignoring the fee which Heather would have

pressed upon him. He would not see, or feel, or take it; and when at length he could not avoid noticing the shy, puzzled look in her face, he said,—

“I do not come professionally, you know; I shall only call when I am in your neighbourhood, and have a quarter of an hour to spare. Good-morning!” and he was off, leaving Heather much surprised, and perhaps, also, a little vexed.

For it occurred to her Mr. Stewart must have arranged to pay Mr. Henry for his services. After her experience of Dr. Chickton, and his guinea a week, she never imagined any one would take the trouble of attending even Lally gratuitously.

The child might be, as Dr. Chickton had remarked, one of the most interesting little creatures he ever beheld; but even supposing Mr. Henry to be of the same opinion (and Heather with all her maternal vanity and affection could not persuade herself the surgeon was anything of the kind), still that opinion need not prevent his taking a fee, since it had not produced a similarly deterrent effect on Dr. Chickton.

Altogether, Mrs. Dudley thought she would write to Mr. Stewart on the subject; and, while expressing her obligations for his intended kindness, assure him he

was depriving her of a pleasure in not suffering her to pay for anything which might hasten Lally's recovery.

She told him, truthfully enough, God knows, she would rather save and economize in every possible way, than that Lally should want for the best help money could procure. She said, what also she believed to be a literal fact, that her husband was perfectly well able to afford Mr. Henry's fees; and she entreated him to allow her to send him whatever sum he had placed in his friend's hands for attending Lally.

And then, almost against her will, but still of necessity, because it was not in her nature to be abrupt or ungracious, she added some words of gratitude for all his kindness to her little girl, and "remained his sincerely,—H. Dudley."

She would not sign herself "Heather," lest the name should attract his attention, and Mr. Stewart noticed the omission. He knew enough of women to be aware that, when possessed of a pretty or uncommon name, they always write it in full, and he liked Mrs. Dudley too much to believe for a moment she was superior to the little foibles and weaknesses of her sex.

"She is a good girl," he thought, as he replaced her note in its envelope; "I wish she had married any other man than Dudley;" after which mental remark he wrote her a few lines, saying she was quite mistaken in her idea, "that he had not mentioned the question of money in any way to Mr. Henry, and explained that, very possibly, if fees were forced upon his acceptance, the surgeon might feel a delicacy in seeing Lally so frequently as the child's state of health required. Mr. Stewart added, he trusted he should on his return to town (the letter was dated from Careyby Castle) hear a good account of his little friend."

But, long before Mr. Stewart's return to London, the temporary improvement in Lally gave place to increased weariness, to weakness worse than pain, to peevish complainings of "being tired, ma, tired;" and then, in despair, Heather looked upon Mr. Henry's now frequent visits as matters of course, and began to watch his face and ponder his words anxiously and fearfully.

She did not know exactly what she dreaded; she could not bear to put it to her own soul that Lally was in danger—that Lally was incurable.

She would sit and think, poor weak heart, of those bright sunshiny days at Hastings, when the progress of her child's disease had stood still, when it even seemed to retrograde and allowed her to play on the sands, and pick up shells among the shingle, and run screaming with delight over the grass; and while she thought, she would persuade herself that change was all Lally needed, that health resided wholly out of town, and sickness solely amongst the wilderness of houses, the labyrinth of streets. That brief reprieve made the subsequent relapse seem all the harder to endure patiently; it was like the hope of a fortune held out to a beggar and then withdrawn, only to plunge him into a deeper and blacker poverty than before.

Against her own fears, Heather fought madly; she could not endure that any one should say Lally looked ill, that Lally grew thinner; she could not bear that Lally herself should complain of weariness. Her love made her at times seem almost harsh; her passionate struggle with the dread which would not now be refused entrance, made her fiercely deny the existence of danger. That which had at one time only caused her anxiety, now rendered her

nearly frantic. She grew irritable and impatient. The sweet repose of old, gave place to a constant desire to be up and doing. Could Mr. Henry give Lally no different medicine ? should he advise taking her away ? Mr. Dudley's aunt was wintering in the south of France, might it not be better to try a total change of climate ? She would go with her, if Mr. Henry thought a different air would restore her strength ; but Mr. Henry declined to recommend travelling at such a season. He said the child was better at home ; better in that warm town-house, with every comfort around her, than she could possibly be elsewhere. And thus things went on, till at length Lally had to be carried up and down-stairs, and lay most of the day on a sofa, drawn close beside one of the drawing-room windows, from which she could look out over the Square.

Even then Heather would not despair ; she thought when once the spring came, Lally was certain to get better ; she was always saying, that the moment mild weather arrived she must take her child to the sea-side, and the pair never wearied of planning the journey, of picturing the waves rippling in upon the shore, of gathering, in imagination, shells and pebbles and

weed ; of fancying how pleasant it would be to see the sun shining upon the waters, as they used to do—as they used—ah ! Heaven.

Once again Lally took up her former cry of “Will it be spring soon, mamma? Will it be spring before very long?” And she would repeat the same inquiry to Mr. Henry, with the addition of—“And when the spring comes, shall I be well?”

The first time she put this question, Heather looked swiftly and sharply towards the surgeon, but she could read nothing from his face.

“Well,” he repeated, “are you not well now?”

“No;” and the poor little head was shaken in confirmation of this hopeless negative.

“Tell me where you feel ill,” he said ; but Lally was incapable of this descriptive flight.

“Has she pain?” he asked ; and Mrs. Dudley answered, “Very rarely.”

She would have liked Mr. Henry to pursue the subject and investigate it more thoroughly, but instead of doing so, the surgeon only took up one of Lally’s hands, and looked at it absently.

He knew, and had always known, that the malady which was on the child, his skill, great though it



might be, could never cure. He knew the disease she had in her, call it by what other technical name his profession might, was, in plain English, Death; and the man who shall discover a cure for that complaint has yet to be born.

He knew her body would grow more feeble, her limbs more easily tired, her poor pinched little face more pinched as the days went by.

He knew, that in the whole of the pharmacopœia, there was not a drug which might give her even a chance of life. He knew this, he had always known it; and yet he could not bring himself to tell Heather the naked truth. He saw the woman's heart was bound up in her child; he guessed, perhaps, that her husband was not likely to be much stay or comfort to her when the hour of trial came; and yet, at length, he decided to speak to Arthur, to tell him his little girl was dangerously ill—ill past all hope of recovery.

Which, of course, when communicated to him, Arthur did not believe. He sent for further advice—for lying prophets, who spoke of healing when there was no chance of healing; and softly descended the staircase, whispering peace in a house where there could be no peace.

And yet, what need was there for them to be cruelly conscientious—unmercifully truthful? If their words broke the force of the descending blow, kept it suspended in Heather's sight, without absolutely crushing her heart, who may say that their subterfuges were wrong—their suggestions useless?

The evil days when no telling should be required, were drawing very nigh; and there was no one, save Arthur, who remained quite blind to their approach.

He had always preferred to ignore facts, if there were any treacherous, illusive, pleasant hope that his feeble nature could clutch. He was not one likely to believe there was any actual danger to be apprehended, so long as he could pay the veriest quack to come and tell him the child's life might be saved. He hearkened to Mrs. Croft, when she assured him all mothers were alike—so easily frightened, so over-anxious, so wearisomely careful about their petted darlings. Scoffingly, almost, she would declare, that but for these "women's fancies" doctors never could earn a living; and she insinuated that, so long as fees were to be had, it was not likely they would pronounce Lally convalescent.

Possibly, she did not herself believe the child's life was in absolute danger; but she did know, not merely that Lally was very ill, but that, by keeping Arthur so much from home, she was infusing another drop of bitterness into Heather's cup.

Had Mrs. Dudley remonstrated on the subject, which she felt far too weary and broken-spirited to attempt, there can be little question but that Mrs. Croft would have retorted, "considering my husband is continually in Lincoln's Inn Fields," which was true, though, certainly, Heather could not be accused of encouraging his visits.

Five times out of six she was "not at home," and yet he haunted the house. He never seemed tired of bringing little luxuries for Lally. The fruit he procured moistened the parched lips; the flowers he sent lay on her pillow; the oldest wine in his cellars, the choicest grapes from his uncle's forcing-houses at Layford, found their way to the sick room, which Lally now never left.

He was fond of children, this man who was childless, and Lally had twined herself into his affections. He would have done anything to save

her, and he importuned Mr. Henry about Lally till that great man became perfectly sick of the sight of his old friend's nephew.

Well, it was down a lane bordered by roses she went to her long home; soft hands tended her; a loving breast pillowed her; friends bore her company sorrowfully while she glided—glided adown that road, the descent in which is, towards the last, so steep and sudden.

Even Heather was deceived concerning the end, which drew nearer day by day, and hour by hour.

It was so gradual, no one could say when the change came—no one could tell exactly when Hope finally left the house, closing the door behind her. No one could remember when the child ceased to make lamentations concerning her own sickness, and grew patient; no one could quite recollect when it was every person about the house, save Arthur, commenced to realise that Lally—the little Lally of a happier time—might never roam again with tireless feet from parlour to dairy, from garden to paddock, of that old home which they seemed to have left so long and long ago.

There was very bitter sorrow in that dear old

house; to their business Alick and Cuthbert went daily with hearts which were heavy with grief for the little plaything about to be taken from them for ever; the girls up from Hertfordshire could not settle to their usual occupations, but wandered idly and purposelessly about the house; the servants crept to their work, feeling the burden of a great trouble oppressing them. Mrs. Piggott could neither rest nor eat, and Priscilla Dobbin's eyes were constantly so red that Harry Marsden's remark concerning them was no longer applicable. Ned took a dreary holiday to come and have a look at "Missie," but had to beat a hasty retreat downstairs, where he sat in the kitchen and cried like a child; but still death was slow about coming; and still Heather kept her weary vigils, and still Arthur would not comprehend.

One evening, utterly exhausted, she had thrown herself on the sofa, leaving Agnes to keep watch beside Lally, when the man who acted as messenger to the company and footman to the Dudleys, entered the room, where no candles were lighted, and nothing dispelled the gloom except the fire burning not over brightly, to inform Heather—

"A young person wished to speak to her."

"I cannot see any one," Mrs. Dudley replied.

"I told her you could not, ma'am," the man replied. He was a very magnificent individual, who impressed shareholders wonderfully, and certainly considered himself a much more important personage than the secretary; yet, notwithstanding his superiority over every one else connected with the "Protector," he had always been graciously affable towards Mrs. Dudley, and now, in her trouble, he felt very sorry for her indeed. He had children of his own, so he informed Mrs. Piggott, and "knew what it was;" whereupon he had taken upon himself to assure the stranger Mrs. Dudley could not possibly be disturbed, and that he should decline delivering any message whatever to her.

But the "young person" had been importunate—she had resolutely refused to take "no" for an answer—and she so persistently insisted on a note she produced being given to Mrs. Dudley, that Tifford at length wavered.

"If you give her that note," the stranger asserted, "she will see me; and if you do not give it to her, she will be sorry hereafter to know it was kept from

her. I will wait outside till she has read it." And so saying, she coolly stepped out into the night through the open hall-door, whereat she had found Mr. Tifford meditating, in the midst of a silence which seemed, no doubt, to him, as great as that Harvey found amongst the tombs.

Frequently, Mr. Tifford declared Lincoln's Inn Fields was as lively as a churchyard; and, at the precise moment the young woman came up and accosted him, he was thinking he might as well be buried alive as shut up there.

"You can close the door," she remarked, noticing his hesitation; whereupon Mr. Tifford at once invited her to "step inside" and sit down, while he went upstairs to his mistress.

The stranger stepped inside as permitted, but did not sit down; she stood on the mat, with her shawl wrapped tightly around her and her thick veil tied close under her chin, until Tifford returning bade her follow him upstairs.

He ushered her into the dim drawing-room, and then shut the door.

By the hearth stood Mrs. Dudley.

"You bring me news," she said, "of——" But

before she could finish her sentence the stranger advanced out of the gloom, and flinging herself on Heather's neck, broke out into a passion of weeping. It was the wanderer come home at last!—it was Bessie, so long mourned, so long looked for, restored at an hour when her advent was least expected.

To Heather it seemed almost as though one had been given back to her from the grave, and for a moment she drew out of it a vague augury of recovery for Lally.

“Bessie! Bessie!” she exclaimed, clasping the girl to her heart; “Bessie—dear Bessie!” And then there were kisses, and sobs, and low-murmured exclamations; they could not ask questions, they were so moved—they could not talk, for very excess of thronging words—they could not speak, because they had so much to say.

At length they stepped back a pace or two, so that each might look in her friend's face.

They had been parted little more than a year, and yet how changed were both!

“You have suffered, Heather,” Bessie said; and then she took the dear face between her hands and turned it so that the firelight might fall upon it.



"Yes—Lally," the other answered, and her tears began to flow once more.

"It was hearing about her brought me to you. I must see her, Heather, though she has forgotten me, of course."

"If she have, it must be very recently," was the reply. "How did you hear of her illness?"

"From Ned," Bessie answered. "I did not know anything about your having left the Hollow, and went there, hoping to be able to see and speak to you alone, but I found the place deserted—oh, it did not seem like Berrie Down any longer!—and then Ned told me Lally was very ill. So, as I could not rest without looking in my child's face—she was almost mine, Heather——"

With a sob, Bessie broke off. The past came back to her as she spoke—the past, with its sunshine, its purity, its peace. She thought of the evening Heather returned from London—the evening when this poor story opened—when she and the child sat upon the grass dividing their bonbons, and a glory lay over the landscape—a glory wrought out of the beams of the setting sun which sank to rest as she and Heather walked slowly towards the house,

talking of Gilbert Harcourt and her own future. Counted by time, that evening did not lie so very far back in the past—but computed by events, it seemed to Bessie as though half a lifetime had come and gone since then.

It was like looking back to childhood from the confines of middle age ; it was like recalling one's youth when tottering feebly to the grave. It was so far away, and yet so near. It was as though for years and years she had been climbing to the summit of some steep hill, till suddenly she reached a point where she was able to pause and glance behind, and from whence she could see close to her, and yet separated by all that lapse of time, by all the toil and labour of the ascent, the happy valley she had left. There, steeped in the sunshine of old, were spread out before her the plains of her earthly heaven. Once again she felt the breath of the sweet west wind upon her cheek ; she beheld the westeria with its wealth of leaves ; she saw the windows of those pleasant rooms wreathed with roses, festooned with honeysuckles. There was a great peace in the air, and the woman whose face had the sad forecasting expression walked beside her over the sward.

There had been a little jealousy between them then; but that was gone and past—passed like winter's frosts, melted like December's snow.

And this was how they met once more, with the child dear to both of them so ill, that, had Bessie returned but a few hours later, she might never have looked upon her living again.

Quietly they passed upstairs together; with silent feet they entered the room where Lally lay, with Agnes still keeping watch beside her.

Heather, as they drew near the bed, put her finger to her lips, as a warning for Agnes to utter no exclamation of surprise.

"I do not want any one to know I am here," Bessie whispered in her ear; "but I could not rest without seeing her. How is she now?"

"Very quiet," Agnes answered.

Very quiet. Yes, too quiet, Bessie thought, as she bent over the child, for the great change to be far distant. Very quiet. Oh, woe! that the little busy feet should ever have grown so idle—that the restless body should ever have become so still!

Very quiet—too quiet, for Bessie had to stoop down to hear if she still breathed. Quiet with the

skin drawn tight over her face ; with her hair, damp and thin, pushed back from her forehead ; with her poor hands, which were now but skin and bone, lying listlessly out upon the coverlet, with her eyes closed and the fringed lashes sweeping her cheek ; with her mouth parted a little, Lally was indeed at last very quiet—quiet enough to have contented any one who had ever thought her too full of health, and mirth, and spirits.

Silently Agnes gave place to Bessie. She took her shawl away, and removed her bonnet, and carried them to a distant sofa. With a glance Bessie thanked her, and then she turned to the child again—her child—whom she had loved, petted, scolded, kissed, and teased in the bright summer weather, and loved, and nursed, and tended, and left when the holly berries were shining above the little bed—her child of whom she had been so fond—her child who had been so fond of her, who had made such moan for Bessie, and yet who had now too nearly done with this world's loves and pleasures to be told her old playmate was returned and standing close beside her.

There was a great silence in the room. Upon

the threshold stood the universal Conqueror, and already the child felt the chilling influence of his presence. With her hand clasped in Bessie's the mother sat watching; with her head resting on the pillow Bessie looked at Lally, never removing her eyes from the child's face.

On the other side of the bed stood Agnes, leaning against the wall, weary and faint; but there was no sound of weeping in the apartment; they would not sob, they would not make lamentation to vex or disturb the spirit hovering on the dark shores of Eternity's mighty ocean.

They hushed their grief, and they bowed their heads in silent prayer, and the rustle of the angel's wings—the angel who was come to fetch their darling—might almost have been heard through the stillness which abode in the room.

All at once Bessie rose, and passing round the bed, asked Agnes in a whisper,—

“Where is Arthur?”

“At Mr. Crofts’,” was the reply.

“Send for him,” said Bessie, and Agnes left the room.

After a while the rest of the family came in one

by one—Alick and Cuthbert, Lucy and Laura, and the servants, Mrs. Piggott, and Prissy, and Jane ; but when the silence was thus broken, the child grew restless, and then Heather motioned them to go—all save Agnes, and Bessie, who, crouched up in a dark corner, escaped observation. Time passed by, and still there came no tidings of Arthur. Once again Bessie spoke to Agnes, and again Agnes went softly downstairs ; when she returned, she whispered that Alick was gone to fetch his brother.

With her anxious eyes Heather followed every movement of the pair, and at length she asked Bessie—“Is it so near?”

A silent pressure of her hand was Bessie’s only answer.

“Would you send some one for Mr. Henry?” the poor mother whispered.

“My darling, what good can he do?” Bessie inquired ; but Cuthbert was despatched for him, nevertheless.

Before many minutes more, however, had elapsed, the child began to move from side to side, and talk wandringly. She moaned gently, and tried to raise herself in bed. Agnes put her arm behind

the pillow, and lifted her a little. Involuntarily Heather and Bessie stood up, as though they heard and felt something approaching, and the former murmured in the very extremity of her anguish, "My child—my child!"

"Don't, Heather—don't?" Bessie said, in an agony of entreaty.

At sound of her voice, Lally opened her eyes wide and looked on the speaker with an expression of recognition.

Almost immediately her moaning ceased, her restlessness subsided; there came a glimmer into her face of remembrance, and a smile—a very ghost of the old whimsical smile—played about her lips as she stretched out her little arms and said,—

"Bessie carry me down among the blackberries, and cover me with leaves?"

Oh Lord! in the days when that was their pastime, who would have dreamed of so pitiful an ending to the short story!

For a moment, for her—for the child—no doubt the chamber was flooded with golden sunbeams—without question she saw the landscape lying still

and tranquil in the clear, calm, bright light of those summer evenings which had been so happy and so glad.

She beheld the trees gently waving their branches in the soft breeze ; she heard the light stirring of the wind amongst the foliage ; she saw the lawn sloping away to the Hollow, the sheep dotting the fields beyond ; she was in her home—her own very home—as she had often called it ; the past was present with her once again, and Bessie stood beside her on the smooth green turf.

The mortal sickness was gone ; the months of feeble health were wiped out ; the limbs felt tireless as of old ; pain was to her an unknown experience, weakness a thing she had never felt ; she was lithe, and active, and strong ; restless and insatiable for movement, as ever ; the game they had played at so often was to be played once more ; adown the slope they were to go, swift, and happy, and free ; adown the slope, over the grass, under the trees, into the Hollow, among the blackberry bushes, and then——

Bessie lifted the child, and laying her in her mother's arms, said, "Take her, Heather."



That was all—a moment after in this world there was no Lally, she had passed to the Eternal Shore.

Ah me! ah me! who in the days not so very long departed would ever have thought that the little comedy of Lally's life should come to hold within it so bitter a tragedy for Heather; who would ever have fancied that the fair freckled face should wear so worn and wasted a look, that the little hands should be crossed and lie so motionless upon her breast, that the eyes should never sparkle with glee nor fill with tears again, that the sound of her laugh should never be heard more?

No more, no more! it all came to Heather's mind as she laid her first-born on the bed—dead. No more, no more! and then the torrent of her grief, like a tide which has for a brief period been kept back by a feeble barrier, broke bounds and swept everything before it in a resistless flood.

No more, no more! never to part the laurels again and peep forth from amongst the green leaves gleefully, never to stand amidst the flowers, with her little frock held up to receive the buds Bessie showered into it, never to sit with Muff in her lap, never to kneel on the sward hugging Nep's great

head, never to be in and out, out and in, never to go to the sea-side as they had pictured, and gather shell, and weed, and pebble, never to see the spring come round again, and the primroses dot the copse. No more—no more !

Never more either to grow older and to change, never to be a grown-up daughter, never to be taught anything, never to alter, never to be either sorrow or comfort, curse or blessing in the future, never to have a bitter memory attached to her ; always to be “little Lally,” always to be a child.

In the future there came consolation to the mother from this thought, but that future was far off in the hour when she knelt beside the bed weeping as though her very heart would break.

Somehow they got her out of the room, and Agnes stayed with Heather while Bessie dressed “her child” for the last time, and left her, a smile still hovering on her lips, to sleep the soundest sleep even Lally had ever known.

Stealing softly down the stairs Bessie met Arthur. She had her bonnet on and veil down, so as she stood aside on one of the landings to let him pass, he did so without recognising her.

The man was white as his dead child, and trembling like a leaf.

He had come too late ! there was no Lally now in the silent room ; there would be no Lally in any room which his feet might enter for evermore.

## CHAPTER VII.

IN BERRIE DOWN LANE.

IT was all over! Skill could do nothing more for her. Love itself was impotent now.

They brought flowers, and strewed them on her; but their bright colours, their sweet perfume, could delight the child no longer. They passed into the room where she lay a score times a day; but Lally never said, "Who's 'at?" or weakly put out her hand to welcome one of them.

Bessie might steal in at night to look once again, and still once more, at the child she had loved so much; but Lally needed no one to sing her to sleep now—she had ceased wearying for her old playmate, and tears for her loss could trickle down her little white face no more.

Even Arthur, who stealthily and like a criminal

watched his opportunity of visiting the chamber at times when no one should witness his grief—even he, with all his sorrow and contrition, could not win a word from Lally, whom he had so persistently, until the very end, indeed, declared to be in no danger.

Not from any evil intention, but merely because his vanity and his weakness were great, he had suffered himself to be led away by the still beautiful woman who had been the love of his youth. He had neglected Heather in days which he now understood must have been very dark to her; he had seen little of his child, who lay before him with her formerly eager face cold and fixed, with her limbs still, with her hands at rest, with the bright flowers already fading on her breast, very quiet—oh! so perfectly still.

What was Heather's grief to his—her passionate woman's sorrow to his? She had sat with the child, nursed her, heard every word the lips now so mute had uttered, supplied every want the body, which now needed nothing, had fretfully desired. Her grief might be very terrible, very hard to bear, but there was no remorse mingled with it. Her tears might flow unceasingly, but there was no

bitterness in them. She could talk of her lost one, and receive sympathy from every person around; but Arthur—he had rarely seen Lally—he had been glad to forget her illness—he had listened to false words of comfort, and now, when his eyes were opened, it was only to look on—death.

An awful repentance had seized him when Alick, having at length succeeded in tracing his brother to one of the theatres, whither he was gone with Mr. and Mrs. Croft to see a new piece which at the time chanced to be creating a sensation, brought him out of the building with one sentence—

“If you want to see Lally alive, come home immediately!”

How he ever reached Lincoln's Inn Fields, Arthur did not know. He had some faint remembrance of walking down steps, and entering a cab, and driving—it might have been for miles, or only for a hundred yards, so far as his recollection of the matter enlightened him.

The blow Tifford dealt him at the door blotted every antecedent event out of his memory.

“Too late, sir,” said that individual, in a low tone to Alick. “It is all over!”

“What is over?” Tifford subsequently informed his friends, Mr. Dudley demanded, adding, “And then, poor gentleman, I told him she was gone.”

Arthur was precisely the man to feel a shock of this kind keenly; a stronger nature could never have suffered itself to be so deluded; and the servants about the house, the only people who noted his visit to the close shut room, suspected that Mrs. Dudley’s grief was less bitter than his; that her open lamentations, her fast-flowing tears were preferable to this silent sorrow—to this tardy repentance which kept him haunting the death-chamber—dragging him continually away both from business and from rest to look on the face of the child he had only grown to love much when she needed no more love from any human being.

It has before been stated, that Arthur Dudley always rated more highly the blessings he lacked than the blessings he enjoyed, and this very peculiarity of his temperament increased the grief which his affection, and his repentance alike were sure to produce when once affection and repentance were useless.

Never before in his life had Arthur Dudley felt

so lonely and so miserable as during the week which succeeded Lally's death. For some time previously he had been gradually estranging himself from every member of his family, and now there was a restraint evident in their manner towards him—a restraint and an awkwardness which neither he nor they, knew exactly how to overcome.

In those days even Heather grew hard, and would not of her own free will speak to him as she did to others about their child, whom he had, as she fancied, neglected.

"She was mine," the poor mother repeated, when Bessie would fain have had her talk to Arthur of Lally, "she was mine, and mine only; he never cared for her. Even strangers—even Mr. Croft and Mr. Stewart, and Mr. Henry—were kinder to my darling than her own father. No, Bessie, I am not unfeeling—it is the truth. He was never with me nor with her; always with that wicked, cruel woman—always—always."

It is a curious anomaly to notice how harsh the very excess of a woman's sensibility frequently renders her.

She feels one side of a question so deeply, that



there is no room left in her nature for considering even the possibility of there being another side at all. And, in that hour of mortal sorrow, Heather had no leisure to bestow a thought on any one except her dead child. Even her love for Arthur seemed blotted out in indignation at his neglect of their first-born.

And yet the iron had entered very deep into the man's soul—so deep, that the day when he followed Lally to her last resting-place was perhaps the bitterest of his life.

They buried her at Fifield. Not so very far from the old home—under the shadow of the grey church-tower—they laid Heather's darling down to sleep

“Lilian, aged six years and four months”—that was the legend her little coffin bore. “Lilian!” No fear of offending the unities now, she was gone where names do not convey much meaning.

“Six years and four months!” She was gone, also, where age and time are not of much account either.

Poor Lally—nay, happy Lally—to have had a life at once so bright and so short, so brimful of everything which can be packed by possibility into the longest span of human existence.

Sunshine and mirth, and love and friendship, and care and devotion.

What—though “finis” was written to the earthly story after a few short chapters—say, friends, was the story less round and perfect in its symmetry for that?

Was the ending in Fifield churchyard all sorrow? Nay, rather there came a time when Heather was able to think, almost with thankfulness, of that child face which should never grow old, nor changed, nor wrinkled, nor careworn, nor other than innocent and pure, waiting for her in that far-off land, where the “ransomed of the Lord shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

All who had been so kind to her in her first illness, came to see the last they could of “poor little Lally Dudley,” together with those who had grown fond of the child towards the end.

Alick was glad there were so many round the grave, for he felt that the presence of strangers would exercise a beneficial influence on his brother, who had been in such grief all the way down—in such sore distress for the loss of the little one he should never in this world see again.


Returning on such an errand to the old place— which he had left with high hopes of success, with almost the certainty, as he thought, of conquering fortune—would have been inexpressibly bitter to Arthur, even without the reflection that his child had died far from him—farther away than though oceans and continents, mountains and rivers, had divided them; and it needed all his strength to carry him through the ordeal bravely, and with good courage.

Mr. Croft was present; but from him, Alick Dudley kept aloof. Even amongst the moss-grown headstones in Fifield graveyard, he could not forget what he had seen amidst the tombs at North Kemms.

He would not break faith with Bessie; but he could not be cordial to the man, although he had been kind to Heather and fond of Lally.

Alick was able, perhaps, now to guess the reason of his fancy for the child; but that did not soften him much towards the offender.

Rather the reverse, possibly; young people are, like most women, apt to be a trifle intolerant. They are very ignorant, and they are very virtuous; their



standard of right is happily high, their idea of sin is, fortunately, that it is black as night. There are two colours only for them in this world; of the delicate shades of grey into which, as the years go by, every human feeling seems ultimately to resolve itself, they have no understanding. It is entire innocence, or entire vice—it is either devil or angel. What is the good of a man being a man, if he cannot resist temptation? where is the boasted purity of a woman, if she have ever even looked on sin?

Very nice sentiments, doubtless, and appropriate to the season and state of life in which they are generally expressed and believed. Too much toleration in the young would prove as dangerous as too many open windows in the spring; to the fleshly mansions, doubtful winds of doctrine would thus be permitted ingress. It is better for young people to continue, as their charming fashion is, delightfully bigoted, than to learn charity from practical knowledge of those temptations which make older persons question whether it be not possible for virtue to drag her spotless robes through the mire, and for vice to go through such an explanatory purification as might almost make a blackamoor clean.

And it was perfectly natural, considering his age, his character, his education, and the circumstances of the case so far as he knew them, that Alick Dudley should take the worst view possible of Mr. Croft's conduct.

Had he not deliberately, and of malice aforethought, come like a wolf in the night, and stolen Bessie away—he with a wife living, too?

Well might Bessie not write to Heather (Alick was not aware that Bessie had returned to the one friend, of whose love and faithfulness she felt confident); well might the guilty creature hold herself aloof from all communication with relative or acquaintance. That Bessie had been deceived, Alick never imagined; that Mr. Croft had not jumped into sin at a single leap, was an idea he would have scouted. How easy, how gradual, how pleasant are the slopes leading down into the valley where Vice holds her court, this young Joshua had no conception. He thought that every offender, every one who went so far wrong as he felt confident Mr. Croft had strayed, ought to be stoned like Achan, so that he might trouble the peace of Israel no more.

Comfortable thoughts these, to fill the mind when

standing beside an open grave ; but they were Alick Dudley's thoughts, nevertheless, and they made him hold himself aloof as far as possible from the man who had, he believed, first stolen Bessie away, and then striven to be kind to Lally, as a sort of offset against the shame he had brought amongst them.

He was contemptible altogether, the lad decided, too mean for him even to despise, and yet Alick would have liked to fight this despicable individual—to put some terrible affront on him—to do him a serious bodily injury—to tell him, that although Bessie was not worth fretting after, still the man who had lured her away was worth punishing.

Nothing Mr. Croft could say or do, Alick kept declaring to himself, should ever induce him to grasp his hand in friendship ; and when all was over, when the body of the child who had never known of her own experience the meaning of the word “loneliness,” was left to lie solitary under the shadow of that grey church-tower till the day of judgment, Alick acted upon this decision, and drawing back from the little group which clustered around Arthur, found himself walking side by side with Lord Kemms.

Heaven knows what put such a thought into the

young man's mind at the moment ; but, after they had passed through the gates, Alick suddenly asked his companion :

“How is Nellie?”

“Stone blind, as you said she would be,” was the reply.

“And I have not yet made the fortune out of which I was to repay you,” remarked Alick.

“I am sorry to hear it, though not for the reason you mention,” Lord Kemms answered. “It would have been better, however, perhaps, for all of you had I never bought her. The money she fetched was the first your brother advanced into the Protector.”

“Poor Arthur !” murmured the Squire's brother ; “but it was not the Protector that brought us back to Fifield to-day.”

“True,” rejoined his companion ; “but, perhaps, your brother's child might have lived a little longer had she never left Berrie Down.”

“You are wrong there, my Lord,” Alick replied ; “nothing could have saved her ; she was dying when she left here, and it was owing entirely to the care and skill of the London doctors she stayed with us so long. It is bad enough as it is, but w

could scarcely have borne the loss had it been as you supposed."

Which view of the case happened to be perfectly true, although Lord Kemms imagined the speaker was mistaken.

Having had a hand in damaging the Protector, his Lordship felt, naturally, anxious to prove that Company the origin of all evil.

Since, in the course of a mysterious Providence, Lally was to die, he would have felt happy to demonstrate that the Protector had, directly or indirectly, been instrumental in killing her.

Now, however, Alick Dudley cut the ground from under his feet. If Lally's short existence had been prolonged, even for an hour, by the skill and kindness of the London doctors, it was impossible for Lord Kemms ever again to insinuate that residing in town had hastened her death.

On that score, at all events, Arthur had no reason to reproach himself, which was fortunate, since when he returned to Berrie Down after the funeral, he felt his burden was quite as heavy as he could bear.

He was pressed for money; his dreams of wealth were vanishing away like mist wreaths; his shares



he feared would never return him even a quarter of the sum he had expected to make by them; the half-yearly dividend had been unsatisfactory; his directors were irritable, the shareholders discontented.

He knew he must shortly let the Hollow, in order to rid himself of farming expenses, and to provide certain funds for paying the interest of the money for which Berrie Down was already mortgaged. He had not merely lost money senselessly, but squandered it foolishly; and to a man who had for so many years of his life looked honestly after sixpences, there was something very terrible in the reflection that he had got himself into debt through unthinkingly spending sovereigns.

In addition to all these causes for regret, Arthur added that peculiarity of his own temperament, which valued whatever was lost or in jeopardy far above any secure or present possession; and the feeling that the Hollow would soon to a great extent cease to be his own property, caused him to view every tree and shrub about it, every stick and thorn, with an appreciative affection as novel as it was painful.

His love for wife, children, property, kindred lay latent until some chance circumstance accidentally revealed its existence to himself ; and most probably the first time he ever really placed a proper value on Berrie Down was when he saw it in the dead of winter, its evergreens bright and glossy as ever ; its lawn sloping away towards the west, the grand old trees tossing their branches in the keen north blast, all passing away from him and his ; passing away from the descendants of those who had held the place for centuries.

He meant to remain at the Hollow for the night ; he had much to talk over with Ned, many arrangements to make, fifty things to see to ; and so he and Cuthbert, and Mr. Croft, who had declined the hospitality of Kemms' Park, were all to stay in the now deserted-looking rooms until the following morning, while Alick returned to town by the latest night-train from Palinsbridge.

It was necessary for him, if he wished to catch this train, to start away from Berrie Down before nine o'clock ; and while the young man was out in the yard impressing this fact on Ned's comprehension, Mr. Croft came and stood beside him.

It was a moonlight night, stormy but still fine. The wind blew great masses of clouds over the moon's face, and then swept it clean and bright again.

"You will have rather a rough drive over," Mr. Croft remarked; and Alick, backing the pony into the shafts, sulkily answered, "Yes, it looks like it."

"Can Ned not harness the pony for you?" was the next question.

"If he tried very hard, perhaps he might," Alick replied.

"Perhaps he will be good enough to try hard, then," said Mr. Croft; "and perhaps you would have the kindness to walk a few yards with me down the Lane. I want to speak to you."

"To me?" repeated Alick, in surprise.

"Yes; to you, particularly," was the reply.

"I will bid Arthur 'good-night,' and be with you directly," the other agreed; and accordingly in a few minutes Mr. Croft and he were walking along Berrie Down Lane, past the pond, and under the elms and beeches that sheltered the road beyond.

"There is bad blood between us," began the elder man, after they had paced on for a short

distance side by side in silence. "There is bad blood between us, and I am sorry for it; but it is natural that you should both dislike and distrust me."

"Was that what you brought me here to say?" Alick inquired.

"No; consider it as my opening sentence,—the stamp with which I have broken the conversational ice; now I can go on. You remember, of course, where you first saw me?"

"It is not likely I should soon forget such a pleasure," was the reply.

"You are satirical, but I am shot proof," Mr. Croft remarked; "you recollect, then, that Sunday afternoon in North Kemms' church, and the girl who kept her eyes fixed so demurely on her prayer-book, which I had afterwards the happiness of restoring to her?"

"And in which you placed a letter," added Alick.

"And in which I placed one of a series of letters," amended Mr. Croft; "good—you remember her?"

"As well as I remember you," was the reply.

"Where is she now?"

The moon sailed out from behind a cloud, as

suddenly and sharply Mr. Croft put this question, looking full in Alick's face while he did so.

"Where is she now?" the younger man repeated, "why, do *you* not know?"

"If I did, I should not come to you for information. Listen to me," he rapidly proceeded, "I would give my right hand to know where she is. I would give a man anything almost he liked to ask, if he only proved to me she were alive and well. You were fond of her, were you not, boy? it vexes you to hear that there is no one belonging to her, no one on whom she has a claim—not even myself who can say where she is, whether living or dead; but what is your trouble to mine? When I looked in your face a moment since, my last hope vanished. I thought perhaps she might have gone to Heather—to Mrs. Dudley, I mean."

"Would you have me understand that she never went off with you?" Alick interrupted. He stood still in the very middle of Berrie Down Lane as he spoke, and the shifting light gave a wild, curious expression to his face. "Do you think I am so simple as to believe——"

"My dear fellow, I do not think you simple, and

it is immaterial to me what you believe ; but I want to know where your cousin is to be found. I desire, at least, assurance of her safety, comfort, and—should such a miracle be possible—happiness.”

“And by what right do you dare to ask anything about her,” demanded Alick ; “you a married man, you who never ought to have written her a line, or met her, or—or——”

“I did not beg you to walk on here with me to-night in order to answer your questions,” Mr. Croft interrupted ; “my object was merely to put one or two of my own. To my first, your face has already replied. I see you know nothing of your cousin’s whereabouts. If you should do so, will you at all events let me know that you have heard from or seen her, and that she is well?”

“No,” Alick Dudley replied, “I will not.”

“That settles my second question,” observed Mr. Croft. “Now, the last point on which I desire information is this : does Mrs. Dudley know we have met before, and where?”

“She knows I have seen you,” was the answer ; “but I have not told her when, or where, or what I suspect.”

"That is to say, Mrs. Dudley does not in any way connect me with your cousin's disappearance?" Mr. Croft remarked inquiringly; and when Alick answered in the affirmative, he proceeded:

"Will you still respect my secret, so far as you know it?"

"I shall make no promise," Alick answered.

"At least, will you let me tell my story for myself?"

"There is nothing to prevent your doing that," the other replied, "any more than there is to prevent my telling mine."

"You are sternly uncompromising," said Mr. Croft.

"I should be sorry to compromise with a seducer and a villain," was the reply.

"You are talking at random, boy, on a matter concerning which you know literally nothing," the person so politely addressed observed, sadly. "Had I spoken to an older man, as I have spoken to you to-night, I should not have been so repulsed."

"Possibly not by an older man like yourself," retorted Alick, with a sneer.

"Good-night," said Mr. Croft, "we will not spoil our naturally sweet tempers by further argu-

ment. Here comes Ned. Shall we shake hands over it? No; good-bye then, and pleasant thoughts as you travel to town. Some day you will think you have not been all in the right in your judgment of me; but I do not quarrel with you for that judgment. It is human to err, and your humanity has erred, perhaps, on the safest side. On a safer side than mine, certainly," he muttered, as Alick, jumping up beside Ned, took the reins, and, with a cold farewell to Mr. Croft, drove off at a rattling trot along Berrie Down Lane, and thence through Fifield to Palinsbridge.

As they passed Fifield church, the moonlight fell clear and cold on the mound of freshly-turned mould, which was heaped over the spot where Heather's darling lay all alone, and the tears came welling up into Alick's eyes when he thought of the dead child.

Any one might have imagined that such tears must soften the heart, and render it for the time, at least, pitiful and tender even to a sinner; but no such change was wrought on Alick Dudley's mood.

All the way up to town, sitting in a corner of the



compartment, he pondered over his interview with Mr. Croft—pondered and wondered; but it never once occurred to him that perhaps he had judged the man harshly, that he had repulsed his semi-confidence very rudely.

He was a sinner—he was all Alick had said; over and over again the youth kept repeating these statements to himself; over and over he found it necessary to refresh his spirit with them, for his conscience did not feel quite satisfied concerning the interview.

Still he had done right, and though the right might be unpleasant and ungracious, it was nevertheless necessary to be performed. Young though he might be, Alick Dudley knew enough of human nature to be aware Mr. Croft was for some reason or other in very grievous trouble: to be confident, he never would have spoken to him had the subject not been one, as he implied, of vital importance to his peace; but what of that? If he were in trouble, so much the better; if he were anxious and grieved, it was nothing but what he deserved.

He had been kind to Lally, it is true; but, again, what of that? In the eyes of Alick Dudley,

Douglas Aymescourt Croft seemed the incarnation of evil, of hypocrisy, of treachery, and of sin.

With all his heart and with all his soul, Alick hated the man—hated him all the more, perhaps, because he felt quite confident, if Mr. Croft once told his tale to Heather, he would deceive her also somehow, perhaps even move her to pity.

And Alick held in those days the pleasant creed, that no human being who went wrong should ever be pitied. Not even the look of Mr. Croft's face, as he stood eager and anxious, waiting for Alick's answer, had been able to soften the youth. Rather, in his stern rectitude, he now blamed himself for having been over-lenient, for having been unduly tender to this wretch who had deceived Bessie, and wrought for her perhaps such misery as he himself was unable to contemplate calmly.

Out and away with him ; on a gallows as high as Haman's, Alick would willingly have hung him ; and, after all, to come to me ! thought this modern Joshua—to come to me !

Ay, there was Mr. Croft's mistake ; perhaps he never had been very young himself, or perhaps the feelings of his youth lay so far back in the book of

years, that he forgot how stern and hard young people, who can be trusted, usually are in their judgments. Be this as it may, the result of the interview had proved different to what he expected, and he returned to the Hollow, smiling a little bitterly as he thought time would teach Alick Dudley a different lesson; that possibly out of his own experience he might after a while acquire a little toleration in judging of others. And in this idea, who may say Douglas Croft was wrong?

True, it is only God who, knowing all about our sins and our temptations, is ever entirely merciful; but still, the more men learn of their own natures, the more fully they come to comprehend how easy it is to do wrong, and how difficult to do right; the closer they form an acquaintance with that lore which nothing except sorrow, and trial, and trouble, and experience can teach, the greater is the toleration with which they regard error; the greater is the diffidence which they feel about affirming of any human being, "In the sight of the Almighty, you are a very grievous sinner."

In precise proportion, as a man towards the close

of his life is harsh and bitter, as he views with loathing not the crime but the criminal, as he ventures to pass severe judgments on his fellow-creatures, so we may be certain his earthly education has been wasted.

It is natural for the young to air their indignation; natural and right, for they cannot conceive the power and might of those temptations which are strong enough to lead wiser people than themselves astray; which meet poor humanity like an armed man; which lurk like lions in the path, yea, are "like lions roaring on their prey."

In the young, it may reasonably be hoped that intolerance is an outward and visible sign of inexperience and innocence, but in the old and the middle-aged it can be regarded but as a token of folly, as a sign of a Pharasaic rather than a humble spirit; of a mental constitution swift to forget personal sins and to notice defects in others; of a bigoted proneness to measure the corn of all men's lives out of one bushel; of a pompous giving thanks to God for having made some people so much better than that poor, low, wretched, tabooed publican; of a disposition ready to find a mote in a brother's

eye, forgetful of the beam which was so utterly displeasing in the sight of Him who has with his own lips assured us, that "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## WOMAN TO WOMAN.

FEMININE curiosity, we may take it for granted, is sometimes less keen than feminine grief. If it were otherwise, in what way, I pray you, should any one account for the fact, that some weeks passed away, from the night of Lally's death, without Heather Dudley knowing all the particulars of Bessie's existence from the hour when she left Berrie Down, till she reappeared in Lincoln's Inn Fields?

In truth, the mother's sorrow was very terrible; so engrossing, that it nearly deadened all desire to ascertain the particulars of another human being's life; besides which, there was a mystery about Bessie—a mystery Heather, in the midst of her grief, intuitively felt chary of intruding on. She wished no one to hear of her return; she came at

night to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was admitted privily by Tifford, whom probably she had bribed to secrecy, for none of the other servants ever heard of her visits. She wore a ring, a golden wedding-ring, and yet her face was not the face of a happy woman. She volunteered no particulars of the events which had intervened between the time when she stole away from the Hollow like a thief in the night, till she returned to see Lally before she died. She was sweeter than of old, but she was also sadder, and her beauty, neither dimmed nor diminished, was yet changed.

All these things Mrs. Dudley beholding, even through her tears, might have marvelled at, though she never inquired into them, until one day there arrived a note from Bessie, saying, "I can tell you no more, dear Heather, unless you will visit me. Come to me once, at all events; I want to speak to you, and I want to show you something."

Dressed in her deep mourning, Heather repaired to the address given—a first floor in Roscommon Street, Pentonville.

What a mean street it was—what small, close rooms that pretty Bessie had selected; and yet

when Heather came to sit down beside the fire, with her old friend's hand clasping hers, she forgot all the words of remonstrance she had intended to speak, and listened to Bessie's sorrowful apologies.

"It is not exactly the kind of parlour I should have liked to ask you to spend a day in, Heather," she said; "but beggars, you know, cannot be choosers; and I wanted to talk to you so much—so much—and to show you something, if you do not mind."

"If I do not mind!" Heather repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes, sweet—my child!" and, with the colour mantling in her cheeks, Bessie went into the next room, her bedchamber, and brought thence a baby—a great, staring, fat baby—with pink feet, and arms that looked as though cord had been tied tightly round the wrists, so deep were the rolls and wrinkles of flesh, so high the mountains and so deep the intermediate valley.


Is it necessary for me to describe what followed during the course of the next ten minutes? What woman is there who does not know exactly how Heather took the little fatuous-looking lump of mortality to her heart and cried over it; who cannot



conceive how Bessie, sitting on a low stool, gazed at the meaningless features of her child, which cooed and clung to Heather, and dabbed its fists in her face, and crowed with delight at the sweet eyes bent upon it, and kicked in an ecstasy of infantile excitement at all the notice "mamma's company" was taking of mamma's autocrat.

Of course there was weeping. Heather could not so soon forget her own first-born as to forbear shedding tears at sight of Bessie's baby ; and then Bessie cried, and, finally, the autocrat yelled, which ebullition of feeling did more towards restoring the mental equilibrium of the two ladies than one of the Church homilies or a charge from the Archbishop of Canterbury could have done.

And still Heather asked no questions, while Bessie, having brought in her boy's cradle, sat rocking him to sleep. Mrs. Dudley, spite of that child, the mean lodgings, the tangible wedding-ring, refrained from cross-examination. In an earlier part of this story, it has been stated that Squire Dudley's wife knew when to keep a discreet silence, but it has not been stated that she frequently did not know when to speak.



She was sensitive to a fault ; and so now, though she felt dying to know, and Bessie sat longing to tell, there ensued a silence which the latter at length broke with—

“Heather, why is it that you have never reproached me? how does it happen you had not a single hard word—nothing but love, and tears, and kisses for me, who repaid your kindness with such bitter ingratitude?”

“My darling! why should I reproach you?” Heather answered. “What am I that I should be hard upon you, *however it may be?*”

“And how do you think it is, Heather?” asked her friend, turning from the child, now fast asleep; “what is your opinion about the matter?”

“I would rather not form any,” was the reply.

“But you must, dear,” Bessie declared; “you are thinking even now about me. What is the conclusion at which you have arrived?”

“I was only marvelling!” Mrs. Dudley answered “If you are married, where is your husband—why are you here? if you are not married—oh! Bessie, sweet, forgive me!”

“Forgive you, Heather!” Bessie answered,

"forgive you! If you think even the implication of such a misfortune so hurtful to me, what will the reality prove to you, Heather? I am not a married woman, spite of this—and this"—she pointed to ring and infant—"I am no more married in the eye of the law, than I was when I left Berrie Down!"

"God help you!" Heather murmured, softly.

"Ay, God help me, indeed!" Bessie repeated. "Sometimes, sitting here alone, I think He has dealt with me very hardly; but, then, I look at my child and grow patient. I want to tell you my story, if it will not weary you."

"Weary me!" Heather exclaimed.

"You do not draw away from me—you do not regard me as a pariah," Bessie continued. "If I were to go to my mother now, and tell her what I am about to tell you, she would order me out of the house, and address me for ever after with the door-chain up. Do you understand me clearly, Heather Dudley?" she said, almost impatiently. "I am not a married woman, and yet I am a mother! Shall I fetch your shawl and bonnet, and send for a cab, and bid you farewell for ever? Don't you hate to touch

me? Is the room not oppressive in which I breathe the same air with you?" and, as she spoke, Bessie rose excitedly, and would have moved farther away but that Heather caught and chid her for her want of faith.

"I am your friend, love," she said in the low tone which had such a virtue of healing and leisure in it—"not your judge. We are woman to woman now, Bessie, tell me what you will."

Then Bessie, flinging herself on her knees, buried her face in the folds of Heather's dress, and sobbed aloud. "I have sinned," she said, "I have sinned, but not willingly; my greatest guilt was my deceitfulness, my sly ingratitude."

"You were deceitful," Heather answered. "Oh! Bessie, how could you, how was it possible for you, to engage yourself to Gilbert Harcourt, caring, as you must have done——"

"Heather, you are wrong," broke in Bessie; "I was engaged to Gilbert Harcourt before I ever saw the—the—father of my child. You know what a life I had at home; you know any life would have seemed preferable to that. Across it in an unlucky hour Mr. Harcourt walked. He fell in love with

me—he was a good creature and a kindly, and so, though I did not care for him in the least, I said yes when he asked me to marry him—said yes, prompted and badgered thereto by my mother, and so became engaged.

“What is the idea of the world in such matters? Is it not almost that a woman engaged is a woman married? Such was my idea, at all events; but I wearied of the tie before long; it is hard always to remember one is engaged to a man for whom one does not care two straws. That was my case with Gilbert Harcourt. I tried hard to like him, but I failed; my sin as regards him was ever promising to become his wife, not in breaking my promise; is it not better to part even at the altar-rails than to take false vows before God? I played a double game for months and months—there was my error; but I was a coward, and I dare never have faced my mother had I told her my repugnance to marrying the suitor she favoured; besides, my other suitor did not come forward. Oh! Heather, Heather, I felt so miserable and so wicked down at the Hollow, I felt so deceitful and false amongst you all. My love, had *you* been my mother, I never should have

been sitting here to-day, a wife, and yet no wife ; had you not been my friend, God only knows where I should have been to-day, perhaps dead, perhaps living in sin, certainly not here, struggling feebly to do right, to atone for my transgression, striving to forget the only man I ever loved, Heather, the only man I ever loved."

She put her hand to her head and moaned as she spoke—moaned like one in some bodily pain.

"Bessie," whispered Heather, bending low, "don't speak to me about your trouble, dear, if it pains you to do so. I do not require to hear——"

"But I require to tell you," Bessie broke in vehemently. "We met, he and I, after I was engaged to Gilbert, where do you think, Heather? in a railway carriage, and he never spoke to me, and I never spoke to him for forty miles while the train rushed on to the lonely country place where I was travelling to spend my Christmas—the Christmas previous to that I passed with you. Mamma and I had quarrelled that morning, and, in consequence of our quarrel, I missed the train by which my friends expected me; the result of this was, that when I arrived at Thirkell no one met me, and there I was

stranded at about nine o'clock of a winter's night on the platform of a lonely country station, where such a luxury as a fly was unknown, and the parsonage whither I was bound three miles off.

"Had it not been for the manner in which I parted from my mother I should have returned to town by the next train due at Thirkell, the station-master informed me, at 10.25 P.M. As things were, however, I decided on making the best of my way to Holston Vicarage on foot, protected by a porter six feet high, who declared his willingness to take charge of me.

"All this time my travelling companion was engaged in sending a telegram to town, to which he said he should wait an answer, and 'in the meanwhile,' he added, turning to me, 'if you are not afraid of the cold, my man can drive you over to Holston and be back here quite as soon as I shall require him.'

"What should you have done under the circumstances, Heather? dropped a pretty curtsy and answered—'Thank you, sir, but my mamma would not be pleased if she heard of my accepting any civility at your hands, and as I am a good child and like to do

what my mamma tells me, I will walk, if you please, all along the dirty lanes to Holston, and make myself as uncomfortable as it is possible for a human being to render herself?

“That would have been proper, would it not, man being woman’s natural enemy? I, however, preferring impropriety to discomfort, accepted his offer, was helped by him into a dog-cart, which seemed to me about five storeys high, thanked him, bade him good night, and in twenty minutes was set down at the door of Holston Parsonage, when, of course, my friends had quite given me up. Oh! dear,” Bessie sighed, “oh! dear, to think that so simple a thing should be the beginning of so much trouble!”

“And after that——” Mrs. Dudley suggested.

“After that, how did we meet?” the girl replied; “the first time it was on the road, and we bowed; next time, we spoke. The people I was staying with were old as the hills, and never took a walk by any chance. I did, unhappily; and so at length it came to pass that we—he and I, met on the downs, in the lanes—sometimes here, sometimes there—but still constantly. I think,” added Bessie, “we both fought against our wish to see each other in those



days—I know I did—I know I chose each morning I went out a different path, but let me go which way I would I met him.

“At last, I thought I had better return to town, but he followed me to London. Can you fancy what it was, Heather, to return to that horrible engagement—to the sight of a man now grown positively distasteful? No, you cannot, love, I know; God forbid you should. What next? we met in town, we met at the sea-shore; and still I did try to avoid him. You believe me, Heather, I did strive with all my heart to do my duty to Gilbert and forget the other, but it was impossible; I loved the last, I had grown absolutely to dislike the first. It was no negative feeling I had for my affianced husband then, it was active aversion. Oh! Heather, then came the part of my life I hate to look back upon. I was not honest, I was not open. When in a fit of repentance, for such I know now it must have been, he disappeared from Southend, where we were then staying, I never told Gilbert I was changed. I let him come on—on—I allowed them all to talk about my marriage; and I meant to marry him, loving the other all the time, and

only angry at his having, as I considered, deserted me."

"Did he—did the one you were fond of know of your engagement to Gilbert?" Mrs. Dudley replied.

"Ah! Heather, do you think there was anything I kept from *him*?" Bessie answered; "and, if I had not been the stupid goose I was, his manner might have told me there must be something wrong. He listened to me, and he thought the affair over, as it seemed, in his mind; and then he begged me to give Gilbert up, but he never said, 'I will come forward and shield you from the storm you dread.' No, he only said, 'If you love me, you will have nothing to do with him.' But I was afraid, afraid of my mother, afraid of being found out, afraid of our being parted, and I had never seen any good in all my life, and how could I be good and firm—how was it possible?"

"My poor child! my poor darling!" Heather murmured.

"You do not know Southend," Bessie said, looking up in the face which was bent down over her. "You do not know Southend. People tell me it is not a nice place, but it was as the kingdom of

heaven to me. There are walks along the shore to Leigh, and walks beyond Leigh to Hadleigh; there is a way along the shore to Shoeburyness, and there are delicious field-paths leading to farm-houses, which seemed to me the very abodes of peace and contentment. Oh! those days—those sunshiny happy days! You are crying, love, what is it? Are you sorry for me? I was a poor weak treacherous girl; but so happy, darling, so blessed!”

And Bessie covered her face with her hands, and the tears came trickling through her fingers. They had indeed been happy days, but they were gone, and she sat weeping for the bliss which had been; whilst Heather, thinking of the sunshine and bliss her own life had lacked, could not choose but weep also.

“Then suddenly he went away,” Bessie resumed, “and soon afterwards I came to stay with you; in your house I learned that summer my alphabet of a better life. Unconsciously, women like you, Heather, mould and purify other women; you are as the salt which salteth the earth—you are as the leaven hid in the three measures of meal——”

“Stop, Bessie dearest,” entreated Heather. “Have

not you, even you, said within this last fortnight, I was hard to my husband, and I have been hard and unsympathetic, and wrapped up in my own grief, Lord pardon me?"

"But I did not mean that you were really hard," Bessie declared; "only that you were not quite the Heather you used to be—the Heather who thought of Arthur before she thought of any one else—there, there—I must get on with my story or I shall never finish it. Where was I?—growing better—when *he* came after me once again, praying, pleading, assuring me, both by word of mouth and by letter, that it could not be right for me to marry a man I disliked; that if I persisted in keeping to my engagement I should be preparing misery for myself, for Gilbert, and for him.

"But still, he never said, 'I will come and claim you from him'—never once.

"How I strove to keep my engagement you may, perhaps, remember; but when he saw I was determined to be true to my promise, he grew desperate, and would have had me risk everything and go off with him then. He explained that he was placed in a difficult position in consequence of his father, on

whom he was dependent, wishing him to marry a rich widow ; and, of course, I was not so selfish as to desire that he should beggar himself for my sake ; so we parted again. Oh, Heather, I did not sink without many a struggle, many a frantic effort to touch secure ground. Everything he told me was false, even to his name ; for he assumed that of a cousin the better to deceive me ; but I loved him then as I love him now ; and then as now. I found it hard to see a fault in him.

“ At last I could bear it no longer, and left with him as you know ; we were married next morning at a church in the City—he had been residing in the parish for the requisite period—and, as we drove away from the door, I saw my father walking along the side path. I could have put out my hand and touched his shoulder, but *he* prevented my speaking to him. He would not let me write to you or any one. He said some day he would avow our marriage, and, till then, I must be patient ; and I was patient. I never wearied him. I never even felt fretful ; if he had asked me to go to Iceland with him, I would have done it. I would have died for him.

“ We were so happy,” she continued, after a

pause; "we had the loveliest cottage you can imagine in a distant county; and, though he said he was poor, I never felt any shortness of money; we never seemed to have anxiety about providing for the morrow's wants. My only trouble was his frequent absences; but still, spite of these, he spent a considerable part of his time with me, and he grew to know you and Arthur, and Lally, and the girls, as though you had all been members of his own household."

"You have more to tell me," Heather said, as Bessie paused.

"Yes," was the reply; "I have, the end of my story. One day, when we were out together, we met a gentleman whom my husband greeted with a certain annoyance and restraint. They seemed very familiar and intimate; but, still, Maurice—I always called him Maurice—did not introduce his friend to me, nor invite him to our house. After he left us, I asked his name.

"‘Oh, that is my rich cousin,’ Maurice said in reply. ‘I hope he did not guess who you are.’

"‘Why, would he tell your father?’ I asked, and he answered ‘No; he did not think so. He believed

him to be a better fellow than all that came to ; but he is a canting idiot,' he said, ' and has got so many strange ideas. If he should happen to call, you must not see him ; remember, you must not, Bessie !'

" I promised him that I would not, and I meant to keep my promise ; but a fortnight afterwards—when my husband having gone up to London, I was alone—this same man stepped, without any announcement whatever, through one of the front windows opening into the garden, and, after very briefly apologising for his intrusion, and the fright he had caused me, commenced one of the most dreadful sermons you ever heard, Heather, and wound up by inquiring ' whether I had ever considered I was going down into hell and dragging his cousin there with me.'

" Thinking he was mad, I humoured him at first ; but, after a time, finding there was a wonderful coherence in his discourse—that it was, in fact, too stupid to be the speech of a madman—I asked him, plainly, what he meant, entreating of him, in the same sentence, not to tell Maurice's father of his son's marriage ; for that fear of bringing unhappiness on my husband was the only grief I had.

“Then it was his turn to look bewildered. ‘Father—son—husband—Maurice!’ he repeated in blank astonishment. ‘My cousin’s name is not Maurice, and has no father living. May I ask pardon if you are *married* to my—the gentleman I—met you with the other day?’

“‘Certainly,’ I answered; ‘do you think I should be here if I were not?’

“‘Then,’ he said, ‘it is my duty to tell you my cousin has most grossly deceived you. The marriage is not, cannot be, a legal one; for, to my knowledge, his wife is alive at the present moment.’

“After that,” proceeded Bessie, “there is a blank in my memory—I suppose I fainted; it was a fearful blow to receive, but the man who dealt it stayed with me for nearly an hour, and was very kind and thoughtful towards me. He did not call the servants; he made no fuss; he threw a little water on my face, and let me struggle back to consciousness without drawing the attention of any one to my trouble. When I was quite recovered he begged my pardon for the mistake he had made in the first instance, and assured me, I think truly, that, had he guessed for a moment the



depth of his cousin's treachery, he never would have been so abrupt.

“‘ But I spoke to him in his own house about you the other day,’ he added, ‘and he bade me mind my own business, and not interfere with his—who you were or what you were, he said, was his concern, and his only. So then I determined that you should not perish eternally for want of a word spoken in time.’

“I let him go on for some minutes—I let him preach to his heart's content, and then I said :

“‘ You have told me his faults—now show me his excuse. He was forced to marry against his will. His wife is old, ugly, ill-tempered. He never loved her ; it was a marriage of convenience, which he was compelled into by others.’

“He knew what I was thinking of—he guessed I was seeking an apology to stay with him. He had sense enough to see I would have given life itself to hear his wife was a hideous old shrew. He had not human feeling sufficient to understand my mad jealousy, but he could not help seeing it was not accusations against my husband I wanted to hear. Oh no ! it was the defence I was panting for.

“ ‘He married young,’ was the reply, ‘a lady of equal age, well born, wealthy, beautiful, accomplished, virtuous. They do not live happily, it is true; but she was his own free choice. He was rich and independent enough always to marry whomsoever he pleased.’

“ ‘And his real name?’ I asked.

“Then he told me, and then only I fully understood how cruelly I had been deceived—what a tissue of falsehoods his story had been from first to last, from beginning to end. He had passed himself off to me as the man who now sat explaining the depth of my misery to me. I showed him the certificate of my marriage, and he said, ‘Yes; according to this the bridegroom was myself. What shall you do now? You will not, I trust, make the matter public, nor think of prosecuting him.’

“Prosecuting him! I stared at him as I repeated the words. Bring trouble to the man I loved! What did he think I was made of, I wonder, to expect I should turn in a moment like that? Husband or no husband, he was still dearer to me than anything on the face of God’s earth; and so I told this bearer of bad tidings, who then seemed to

fear I should fall, as he expressed it, into deeper sin; that my beauty—he had the grace to admit I was beautiful—should prove a worse snare than ever to his cousin, a lure of the devil to trap him to destruction.

“I could not bear any more after that. I asked him if he were a clergyman, and he said no; that the sect to which he belonged approved of lay preachers, and that all men were ministers whom the grace of God moved to speak His word.

“‘And do you imagine such lecturing will do me any good?’ I said; ‘do you not know you are taking the most likely means to make me remain where I am? Do you consider it is a light trouble which has befallen me? Do you expect me to feel grateful to you for bringing news which has utterly destroyed my happiness?’ for I was so happy—so happy.

“‘Sinfully happy,’ he said.

“At that I fired up. Where was the sin, I asked, when I knew nothing of it? Why could he not have left me alone, now the thing was done and past, and that no act of mine could undo it? Why did he come there? I raved, I think I must have

done, for at length he said he would leave me for a season, and return the next day when I grew calmer, and more willing to listen to the voice of consolation.

“ ‘Meaning yours,’ I suggested.

“ ‘I will help you, if you permit me,’ he answered ; ‘help you with advice—money to go back to your friends.’

“ ‘No,’ I said, ‘you will not. You have done what you consider your duty ; and, if I do not thank you for your misjudged kindness, it is only because I find it difficult to speak ordinary words of courtesy when my heart is broken. There is nothing more you can do for me—all the rest lies between him and me—between him and me and God, and in the bitterness of our future no man shall meddle.’

“ ‘As you wish,’ he answered ; ‘only tell me one thing more: have you friends to whom you can apply for assistance? I only ask that I may feel you are not quite desolate.’

“ ‘This touched me a little. ‘I have one friend,’ I said, ‘who would not, I know, turn from me in any distress or difficulty.’

“ ‘And that friend——’

“ ‘Is a woman,’ I finished, ‘and one not of my own kindred nor of mine own house ; but I shall not go to her, and what I mean to do I shall not tell you.’

“ He turned and looked at me doubtfully ; then he said, ‘ May I call to-morrow ? ’ to which I answered, ‘ Yes,’ if he would only leave me then.

“ Twice on his way to the window he stopped and hesitated ; and while he went down the garden, I saw him clasp his hands as if praying.

“ I longed to fling a book after him ; but I was wrong, Heather, I was wrong. I believe him to have been a good man, though he did come and take all the sunshine out of my life in a minute, for it was such sunshine, and I was so happy.

“ When he left me, then, for the first time, I realised my position. I will not tell you, Heather, what I passed through during the hours that followed. There was a time when I knew, if such a temptation had been presented to me, I should have yielded to it ; but I thought of you, and that thought made me strong. I seemed to hear your voice calling me away. I fancied I could see your eyes plead-

ing—pleading for me to leave; you saved me, Heather. I should have stayed on, had I never known you; I should have stayed on or drowned myself—the temptation swayed now to sin, now to suicide, and when I left his house, I do not think I knew exactly whether it was to be life or death,—whether I would end the struggle or endure it. I believe I was mad.”

“And how long is it since all this happened?” Mrs. Dudley inquired.

“Months and months ago,” was the reply. “How far I walked that night, all through the darkness, I should be afraid to say; for how many days and nights I wandered purposelessly on, I could not tell you: my mind took no account of time or distance. It was in the autumn, and the weather lovely. I kept to the field-paths and the lonely lanes; I avoided high roads, and railway stations, and towns. I had no object in view except to get a long distance away from him; and where I should ultimately have walked to, I cannot imagine, had my strength been equal to my will; but it was not. I dropped down one morning on a piece of green sward under the shelter of some elm-trees, (the

place reminded me of Berrie Down Lane,) and I thought I was dying. I saw a house in the distance, and strove to crawl on towards it, but failed in the attempt. I do not remember anything after that, until I found myself lying in a strange bed in a strange room, with my baby beside me.

“English Samaritans dwelt in the house I had seen amongst the trees, and some of them finding me lying dead, as they thought, by the wayside, carried me in. I was ill for months, and during the whole of that time they never asked me who I was, or whence I came. Voluntarily, however, I told them my story, and then they would have had me stay with them always, and teach their children, and give such poor service as I could in exchange for board and lodging.

“I agreed to do so ; but, before I settled down, I felt I must see you once more, and hear how Lally was. So I made my way to the Hollow, where learning from Ned that she was not expected to live, I travelled straight on to London,—and you know the rest. I will go back to my friends very shortly now. I have written to tell them the reason why I could not return before.”

"But why not stay in London, Bessie?" inquired Mrs. Dudley.

"Because I am poor," was the reply, "and I must now work for myself and my child; because I shall be safe there from any fear of meeting him,—because I have nothing to keep me in London, excepting you; and you, Heather—will let me write to you occasionally, will you not?"

"That was not the way in which you intended to finish your sentence," remarked Heather, with a smile.

"No," Bessie answered, frankly, "it was not."

"You were going to say you could not come to see me quite safely, because you thought I knew something of the person who has brought you to this, my child."

"Don't, Heather—don't!" Bessie pleaded.

"I am to ask no questions, then? I am not to inquire his name; but there is one thing I may do, love, and that is tell you what his cousin would not, that if it be the individual I suspect, he is one of the most miserable men on earth."

"And do you think he really loved me?"

"How should I be able to tell that?" Heather



answered ; “and you must talk of love no more in connection with him, Bessie ; for love becomes sin, when it is impossible for it to produce other fruits than shame and sorrow.”

After that the two women sat silent for a time,— Bessie holding Heather’s hand, and Heather stroking Bessie’s hair gently and thoughtfully.

Little more than twelve months before, Heather had told Alick she did not know much about wickedness herself, and behold, already she was coming dimly to understand, that no human comprehension of life can be perfect, the boundaries of which exclude from sight, all evil, all passion, all temptation, all repentance, all despair.

## CHAPTER IX.

## DIFFICULTIES.

THE new year brought with it no increase of business to the Protector Bread and Flour Company.

On the contrary, several pairs of stones were standing idle at Stangate, and night-work was now a thing unheard of. Many men were discharged on account of "slackness," and the labour of those that remained resulted rather in the accumulation of stock than in the execution of orders.

Orders to be executed had become, in fact, few and far between.

As for the bakehouse, it happened fortunately, perhaps, that no gentlemen of the press desired to see it in the later days of which I am writing, for it had become like one of those places in Pompeii, where, although the implements and utensils neces-

sary for carrying on a trade still exist, the trade itself is a memory. Six months in London being about equivalent to six hundred years in Pompeii, the once busy courtyard and works now resembled nothing so much as a City of the Dead.

Over the Protector something worse than lava had flowed ; and, although there was stock everywhere, —stock, and to spare—wheat in quantity, sacks and sacks of flour, still every one looked gloomy,—every one felt that “things were going queer.”

Half of the vans were now never pulled out of the sheds ; a large number of the horses—creatures that, as we know, eat their heads off when standing idle in the stable—were sent to Gower’s and sold there by public auction ; stripped of their fine liveries, many of the “Company’s servants” were now driving unornamental carts about the City, thankful to earn their guinea a week and supplemental pots of beer, wherever such terms were obtainable ; most of the Company’s depôts were closed, and had large bills stuck upon the shutters, signifying “that these desirable premises were TO LET ;” the rounds were shorter than of old, and the men now stopped to get half-pints of ale

anywhere they liked without reprimand or dismissal.

A cloud of general depression had settled down upon the directors, the shareholders, and the employés of the Company ; there was nothing much doing at Stangate, and there was less in Lincoln's Inn Fields. About the former establishment, Mr. Robert Crossenham walked disconsolately with his hands in his pockets ; before the fire, in the latter, Arthur Dudley read the *Times* diligently, and smoked the last Havannas he was ever likely to have presented to him free of charge.

In the outer office, the clerks consumed walnuts in quantity, pelted each other with the shells, and looked at their watches, or the clock half-a-dozen times in the course of an hour.

Business was, in a word, as bad as the weather, and that could not by any possibility have been worse. The sky, as regarded the physical world, was leaden ; the streets, sloppy ; the air, raw ; east winds prevalent ; in the City, things were drooping ; stocks, heavy ; rhubarb, a drug ; indigo, blue ; shares, flat ; corn, falling ; sugars, depressed ; money, dear.

The only branch of commerce, the vigour of which did not seem impaired, was that of advertising. People advertised their wares in despair, thinking, if a smash were to come, they might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb,—as well face Basinghall Street with a creditable list of debts as go through the Court for a few hundreds.

It was sink, or swim, with a vast number of persons during the earlier months of the year in question, and yet the papers never were so full of advertisements. The *Times* came out with daily supplements, and the *Telegraph* with its extra sheet; the *Standard* curtailed its usual quantity of letterpress, and the weeklies raised their prices per line, and would not guarantee immediate insertion. Not to be out of the fashion, the Protector Bread Company, Limited, announced each morning in the columns of the daily papers, “that pure bread was obtainable nowhere excepting at the depôts of the Company;” and every now and then a copy of an analysis from Daniel Smith, Esq., M.B., Ph.D., M.A., F.R.S., &c., Professor of Chemistry in the College of the Home Counties’ Hospital, and Medical Officer of Health for Belgravia, was ap-

pended, stating that he had found a loaf of the Company's bread to contain so much of so many things, and to be perfectly free from a certain number of other things; that all articles used were of the best quality, and that he considered the process of manufacture employed at the Stangate Works, to be highly cleanly, and satisfactory.

But all this could not make the bread sell. The tide of fortune had turned, and the waters of success were ebbing away from the goodly ship "Protector" more rapidly than they had ever flowed in on the commercial shore, where that once promising vessel now lay almost a wreck.

There was not a creature connected with it, however, who would admit that the venture was even in danger; and yet every person's temper became, if Arthur Dudley's report were to be believed, unbearable.

His own temper, never the most pliable, was severely tried; and now, instead of longing for each morning to dawn, in order that the business of the Protector might advance still further towards success, he hated to see day break—hated leaving his breakfast-room and going downstairs to meet those

unpleasantnesses which had become of hourly, and momentary occurrence in his life.

Between his principals and the public, in fact, Arthur stood exposed to cross fires. He dreaded seeing a stranger enter the office ; he looked forward to board-days with perfect horror.

His old enemy, General Sinclair, C.B., tormented him beyond all powers of expression. He seemed to think, that in Arthur's hands lay the power of making the Protector a failure or a success. He frequently declared, their secretary was inefficient—his business capabilities below contempt. When once matters began to go a little wrong with the Protector, he commenced laying all the blame at Mr. Dudley's door. He affirmed that Lord Kemms' open repudiation of any connection with the Company, was owing entirely to the secretary's lack of management ; he called at the office, and told Mr. Dudley he considered a person, endowed with even the most moderate share of sense—an old friend and neighbour, moreover, of his lordship—might have arranged the affair without permitting it to be brought under the notice of the public ; and, in the course of subsequent conversations, he more than

once hinted his opinion, that, although the gentleman he had the pleasure of addressing might be a gentleman, he was not much better than a simpleton.

To which innuendo, delicately implied, Arthur, with more spirit than might have been expected, considering the state of his finances, replied, that General Sinclair had ample reason for thinking any person who relinquished his independence for the sake of becoming servant to a dozen masters, must be either foolish or mad.

“For my part,” added the secretary, “I believe when I was persuaded into having anything to do with the Protector, that I was both ; and I can very truthfully say, if I could only get back the money I have lost by this confounded Company, I would cut the whole concern to-morrow. Meantime, sir, if you have any complaint to make of my conduct, I would thank you to bring it under the notice of the board. I am compelled to bear bullying once a week, but I will not endure it oftener.”

Upon this, General Sinclair, boiling over with rage, inquired if he (Mr. Dudley) knew to whom he was speaking ?

“Yes,” Arthur answered, “I do ; to that one of



the directors of the Protector Bread and Flour Company, Limited, who took my place on the board when I resigned ; and, with all my heart and soul, I wish I had never heard of the Protector, nor advanced a penny-piece for the purpose of bringing it before the public."

And every word that Arthur said, he meant. He was sick and weary of his thankless office ; of the preparation of unsatisfactory reports ; of conversations with disheartened shareholders ; of entering minutes of depressing proceedings.

Adversity, as has been stated, had not proved beneficial to the tempers of his directors, and stormy meetings were now the rule instead of the exception. Every man looked angrily on his neighbour ; every orator believed the last speaker, and the speakers who had preceded him, wrong — practically and theoretically, root and branch ; every creature had his own pet plan for restoring public confidence in the Company, and was wont to return home full of dismal forebodings, of doleful prophecies.

Mr. Black alone, perhaps, preserved his equanimity, and assured his colleagues, that, if they

would only have patience, the tide must turn. For his part, he said, he had seen so many ebbs and flows, that he did not care a snap of the fingers for any temporary depression. People had not ceased to eat bread ; and, although they might for a time have changed their baker, still the best article must secure custom in the long run. He vehemently protested against the closing of shops, and the reduction of vans. "Better to have given the bread to the nearest charity," he said, "than to have adopted such a course. Penny wise and pound foolish, he declared the policy adopted had been. He had advised putting on steam, instead of reducing the pressure, and reminded his fellow-directors of the fact ; but of course," he added, "they knew best ; their experience, no doubt, was greater than his ; there was no knowing, indeed, what the best plan to pursue might be, till they found out which plan led to fortune or failure. For his part, however, he thought it was always judicious in business, as at whist, when doubtful to play a trump. He would have played a trump, and if the game were to prove a losing one, he would, at all events, have lost with éclat ; but, as he said before, he deferred to the

superior wisdom of his colleagues, and only trusted their wisdom might in the long run prove profitable to all parties interested.

But the united wisdom of the directors of the Protector did not prove profitable, and every board-day more temper was exhibited, till at length the papers began to take the matter up, and the very journals who had written leaders concerning the philanthropic and admirable construction of the Company, now found spare corners which they filled up with paragraphs, headed, "The Protector Bread Company again;" or with letters from indignant shareholders, who could not understand the gross mismanagement which must exist somewhere in a company, the directors of which declared a dividend of fifteen per cent. per annum at the first half-yearly meeting, and found their profits during the second six months only enabled them to pay with difficulty two and a half per cent. ! Truth was, as Mr. Black—who practically knew a vast deal more about the mind of the British public than the rest of the directors were likely ever to evolve out of their internal consciousness—declared, the very honesty of the board swamped the Company, or, at least,

hastened its extinction. No subterfuges; no cooking of accounts; no hints to the secretary, that at the moderate expense of a bottle of good ink, a few quires of paper, and a hundred of pens, things might be made to look as pleasant as any body of shareholders need desire to see them! it was all as though a doctor, being called in to see a bad case, were to lay the peril of his position before the patient—to exhibit to him, in its appalling nakedness, the poor chance he had of recovery.

“Enough to kill the man at once!” remarked the promoter to Mr. Robert Crossenham; “and enough to kill a company, if it had as many lives as a cat. What the devil do we want with directors or any board? If they would only find the money, I swear I’d find the brains. It is such a mistake, having so many masters. Well, if the ‘Protector’ goes smash, I shall always say, one of the finest pots of broth ever a man brought to boiling-point was spoiled by too many cooks having a hand in dishing it.”

As for Mr. Stewart, he even, had his fits of irritability—his hours when he came to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and treated Arthur to his opinions.

He said, he felt perfectly confident there was

something radically wrong about the Company, and he seemed to imagine Arthur could help him to discover where the wrong existed, if the secretary would only set his brains to work.

Some short time after Lally's death, he remarked, a little apologetically it is true,—

“I wish to Heaven, Dudley, you would bestir yourself! Surely, it is as much your interest as mine to find out what game Black is playing—for that he is playing some game, I am satisfied.”

“If he be, I am ignorant of it,” Arthur answered. “I presume you do not suspect me of playing into his hands?”

“No, Mr. Dudley, I do not,” the director answered; and from that day Mr. Stewart came seldom to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Whatever suspicions he might entertain concerning Mr. Black's immaculate honesty, he did not again take Arthur into his confidence, but left the secretary in undisturbed enjoyment of his office, where he had at least the variety of seeing the ship containing his fortunes sink a little lower, week by week.

But trade was bad with every one—so Mr. Black

declared—so even Mr. Raidsford stated on one occasion, when he and Arthur, meeting in Lombard Street, the pair commenced singing a mutual Jeremiad over the state of things in the City.

“There is a general distrust,” remarked the contractor, “for which I am quite at a loss to account, and a pressure for money, even upon good houses, which is unprecedented, at all events, in my experience. No doubt, as the spring advances, business will improve, and I most sincerely hope your shares may then feel the effect of greater commercial confidence.”

All of which was said in the City oracle style, which, unwittingly, perhaps, Mr. Raidsford had contracted, and which impressed country people with the idea that he was a power in the state—a man who had risen quite as much by talent as by industry; and yet, spite of his mode of settling everything which was to occur in the future, Mr. Raidsford was more humble on that occasion than Arthur had ever before seen him.

He had less of the “I am the people, and wisdom shall die with me” manner, which had often angered the Squire in days gone by, than formerly; indeed,

if such an expression be not out of place in speaking of so great a man, his tone was almost humble ; and while he sympathised heartily with Arthur's anxiety, he forbore reading him a lecture on the instability of all human companies, and did not, even from the heights of his own superior position, look down and say—"I told you how it would be. I, of course, who always see what is going to occur, told you ;—don't blame me."

No, instead of this, he remarked, "it was a wonder the 'Protector' did not succeed, since the Company's bread was so good, and people must eat, you know." He added, "Certainly, however, a company, like an individual, adopting, and strictly adhering to, the system of ready cash, must be prepared to stand a considerable amount of knocking about at first ; but I do hope things will brighten with you after a little—I really do ;" having finished which speech, Mr. Raidsford went his way, and Arthur proceeded on his, thinking he liked the contractor better during that interview than he had ever done before, and regretting to see his former neighbour looking so thin, and anxious, and careworn.

Which facts, when, in due time, Arthur commu-

licated them to Mr. Black, produced a careless comment, to the effect, "that very probably his Majesty had cause for uneasiness; people do say things are going deucedly queer up there; but there is no use talking," added Mr. Black, "things are queer with everybody. I never was so hard up in my life; discount is a thing past praying for. If you take a bill to the bank now, with, say, even my Lord Mayor's name on it, the manager looks at you as if you were no better than a thief. It is no good being down-hearted, though; if care killed the cat, I still see no reason why care should kill us. We shall find the 'Protector' looking up yet, never fear, and the shares at a premium again. Deuce a share is at a premium in the City, I think, at this present minute of speaking. Where the money gets to, every now and then, passes my understanding. The parsons talk about riches taking unto themselves legs or wings, and fleeing away, or something of that kind, don't they? If their reverences were in my office for a month, they would find out there is more truth in the statement than most of them actually believe. Fly! by Jove! that's no word to express the pace they go at. Electricity is a fool to



it;" and so Mr. Black rattled on, till Arthur, utterly overwhelmed, bade him "Good-day," feeling much too dispirited to put the question he had intended about those bills which would soon be falling due once again.

For things had come to such a pass, that Squire Dudley was compelled to cut down his expenditure by every possible means. Even at Berrie Down he never more scrupulously looked at a sovereign before changing it than now, when it occurred to him not merely as a possibility, but as a probability, that there might be a terrible reverse to the speculative picture to which, while the Protector was still a myth of the promoter's fancy, Mr. Black had acted as travelling showman.

No more visions of wealth and position for Arthur—no more dreams of standing for the county, of re-establishing the Dudleys as great people—of keeping up a certain state at Berrie Down—of ease, and comfort, and competence.

His ideas in many respects were much changed since he came to London; and had it only been possible for him to see a way of ridding the Hollow of all the encumbrances he had thrust

upon it, the secretary would have been a happy man.

Like the prodigal, he had gathered all together, and travelled into a far country—a strange country, where he met with those who helped him to waste his substance and devour his living.

And now, behold, the days of famine were at hand, when no man would give unto him ; when he fell into even a worse plight than the poor sinner who would fain have satisfied his hunger with the husks the swine did eat ; for the prodigal had a home to which he could return, while Arthur had none.

Longingly, sickeningly almost, his thoughts turned back to Berrie Down as he walked through the streets of the accursed City (so he styled London), where he had come to seek his fortune.

If the past could only be restored to him, he moaned in spirit, how differently he would act ! If he only could have foreseen his present strait—if he only could have imagined such a termination to his hopes !

If—if—if ! So the impotent, feebly-repentant strain ran on ; if—if—if—although the measure of his misery was as yet nothing like full.

Berrie Down was still mortgaged for only half its value. He had his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields—his regularly paid salary—his shares, which might yet bring him in some return.

He was not involved past hope of extrication. Before his bills fell due again, Mr. Black would more than probably be able to meet them. The future did not lie shrouded in total darkness before him; but as he had been unreasonably sanguine, so he was now unreasonably depressed. He knew more about business, too, than had formerly been the case; he understood better that there were risks in it as well as certainties—blanks as well as prizes, and he could not blind himself to the truth that Fortune had not hitherto favoured him with so many smiles, as to justify his imagining she would never dishearten him with her frowns.

Besides all this, he was for the first time since his marriage wretched in his home. He could not bear to see his wife's sorrow—a sorrow in which she gave him no chance of sharing.

The changed, worn face—the eyes heavy with weeping, the weary, unelastic step—the silent grief which found no relief in words—were so many tacit

reproaches for the cold selfishness which had kept them apart through the course of the years gone by.

Vaguely it began to dawn upon his understanding that nothing earthly can live for ever—that there is no plant so strong but the keenness of a prolonged frost may kill it ; that if men do not enjoy and prize a blessing while it is blooming beside them, the day will surely come when they shall sigh for its fragrance, and its beauty all in vain.

He had neglected his wife's love in the years when that bright stream flowed through the fields of his existence, nourishing and making green as it poured its treasures on his unthankful heart ; and now the fountain gushed no longer ; the spring was dried up, the waters made no gladness in the land. Where there had been life, there was lifelessness ; where there had been devotion, there was indifference ; where there had been championship, there was resentment,—and Arthur did not know how to put the wrong right. He had not strength sufficient in his character to set about winning Heather for the second time—wooing the woman as he had wooed the girl.

She had no idea her husband was in such trouble ;

she was ignorant of his fears as she had been of his hopes. No one told her Berrie Down was mortgaged—that it must be let, in order to pay the interest—that the Protector was tottering—that trade was wretched, that money was almost an extinct currency.

Mr. Black was the only person, indeed, she ever heard mention financial matters at all, and the words he spoke conveyed very little meaning to her understanding.

“Money,” said that gentleman to Arthur one day when she chanced to be present—“money, what is it like? Can you remember ever having seen the article? The first five-pound note which comes my way, I intend to frame and keep by me, lest I should never behold another. Some people must be laying up for themselves a lot of treasures; but who they can be, puzzles my brain. According to his own account, not a soul I meet has sixpence in his pocket to keep the devil out of it. Do you happen to know any one, Mrs. Dudley, who has money, for I do not? As for me, I am thinking of applying for out-door relief—sending Mrs. B. up to the workhouse for a couple of loaves. We are coming to it, fast as we can run.”

"Some people have money, I suppose," answered Heather, remembering at that very moment she had a good round sum locked up in one of her drawers—which sum proved a perpetual plague to her—a plague and yet a comfort.

It was not her own, it was trust-money ; and how the amount chanced to come into her hands, Heather never told to any one for many a day afterwards—for many and many a long day. And yet there was no particular mystery about the matter. Heather had the money from Mr. Douglas Croft, and it was given to her in this fashion :—

After due time, he came to condole with her on the death of Lally, and then his visits were repeated and repeated until Heather, who could not avoid guessing the nature of the feeling which drew him towards any of Bessie's kith or kin, began to grow uncomfortable—to imagine she ought to cut short the intimacy somehow, though it was beyond her imagination to conceive how she ought, under the circumstances, to do so.

Perhaps her manner showed her difficulty ; perhaps Mr. Croft fancied truly, as the days went by, there was less cordiality in her smile, in the touch of her

hand, in the tone of her voice! Anyhow, be that as it will, he took courage one day, and made his confession.

He attempted no apology; he did not strive to whiten the blackness of his sin to her. He did not even speak the name of the woman he had wronged. He merely said, "Some day she may come to you; some day she may want money. Let me leave a sufficient sum in your hands to keep her—if she be living—from absolute poverty. Be to me my good angel! do not believe my repentance insincere because I cannot talk much about it. You are my last hope. If it be impossible for me to reach her through you, then indeed my case is desperate."

Naked he laid his sin out before her—naked as the new-born child, and yet he prayed her not to look askance upon it, but to pity and forgive. Well he understood—this man to whom the world and its ways were roads he knew from beginning to end, from the first chapter to the last—that to the woman whom he addressed the book of sin was almost as a dead letter, as a language unlearned, as a science incomprehensible.

Passion died out in her presence, vice found no

defence sustainable when pleaded before that calm, impartial judge. She could not go with him in his agony of love, of struggling virtue, of wicked strategy, of unavailing repentance—she, whose life had never known the rush and tumult of an overpowering affection, who had never been adored, idolized, wronged, by any man, as it was in Douglas Croft's nature to adore, idolize, and wrong,—she, who was pure in thought and deed, pure almost as one of God's angels—how could he tell her of the over-mastering love which had overleapt all boundaries of prudence, all restraints of society, all divine laws, all human restrictions?

But he could appeal to her pity, and to her generosity. He could lay his future at her feet, and pray her to do with it as she would; to give him Bessie's address, if it came to her knowledge, or to withhold it; to mention his name to Bessie, or to preserve silence concerning him; to say, if Bessie ever wrote or came near, or to ignore her existence, as she pleased—as she deemed best.

“I make no conditions, I ask no mercy, Mrs. Dudley,” he said. “I place myself in your hands; and I merely entreat that you will do whatever



seems to you best, regardless of my feelings. If I could only know she is living!" he added.

"She is living," Heather interrupted.

"Then you have seen her!" he said, eagerly; "is she in London?"

"You must not question me," Mrs. Dudley replied. "All I can tell you is—that—the girl, whose future you have made so wretched, is living. The greatest kindness you can do her now is to forget that such a person ever existed. I will keep this money, if you wish, in case she should ever really be in want of it. At present, I know, she would not take sixpence from you, and I cannot wonder at, her feeling as she does towards you."

"Then you have seen her?" he inquired.

"Yes, and talked with her; and guessed who stole her from us—stole her away to shame, and grief, and suffering——"

At that point he interrupted her, vehemently, "Why should she be ashamed," he asked, "for that which was no fault of hers? and was she not better, as she lived with me, believing herself to be a wife, than legally married to Harcourt—a man for

whom she never cared two straws? Is not anything, any sin, any disgrace, any suffering, preferable to a loveless marriage? Answer me, truly, Mrs. Dudley," he persisted; "do you not believe it is?"

With her cheeks on fire, Heather rose and answered him—"Why do you put such a question to me, Mr. Croft—to me, of all women living?" and then she covered her face, and wept aloud—wept for the life she could never live over again, and which had been so poor a counterfeit of existence that she might almost—but for her early training, but for the conviction, that it is better to "suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"—have wished to change places with Bessie, in order to experience the sensation of being loved wildly and passionately, even though it were sinfully, and so round off the incompleted paragraph of her life, have the sad seventh resolved into the legitimate chord.

Heaven help her! she felt very weak and very miserable, surrounded by people, whose stories seemed all more perfect than her own; and Douglas Croft, beholding that unexpected outburst, felt in

his soul there were more ways of deceiving a woman than by a sham marriage ; more means of breaking a loving heart than by deceit, and falsehood, and wrong.

“ God pardon me,” he thought, as he walked slowly home ; “ but yet, have I been worse than Dudley ? Is it more sinful to love and betray a woman, than to marry her without love ? ” and, as is usual with all such questions, he decided the matter in his own favour—never reflecting that two wrongs cannot make a right, that a volume of platitudes will never patch up a woman’s reputation, nor enable her to go back again through the years, and begin her life anew.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

ALL this time the affairs of the Protector were falling into a more hopeless state of confusion than ever.

No talk now of shares going up to a premium. If a man had offered a handful of them to a beggar in the street, they would scarcely have been accepted, excepting for pipe-lights. On the Stock Exchange, every person knew better than to touch them. The Company was given over by commercial doctors, and no one felt inclined to waste a guinea on propping it up. If trade would only take "a start," the directors remarked; but then, unhappily, trade did nothing of the kind.

Within eighteen months of the promising child's birth, one of the very objects for which Limited Companies are ostensibly established, namely, to

provide such a capital as shall enable a certain number of traders to live through bad seasons, in the hope of better days coming—this object, I say, was utterly ignored.

To extend their business, the directors would not have hesitated to make a further call upon the shareholders; but to carry their business through a time of extreme commercial distress they refused to do anything of the kind. To have made a further voyage, Mr. Black told them, they would have crowded on all sail; but at sight of the first storm their seamanship proved useless, their courage failed them.

All in vain he and Mr. Stewart—united at last—moved and seconded various courageous resolutions; the other directors were cowardly, and refused to acquiesce. Mr. Black was twitted with the ill success of many of his bantlings; Mr. Stewart was reminded of the fact that his nephew had been the first to leave the ship.

“The very fust shares,” remarked Mr. Smithers, the great miller at Plaistow, worth Heaven only knew how much money, and likely, before he died, to be worth a few hundreds of thousands more—

“the very fust shares as was sold out of this here Company below their aktual market value was the property of your nephew, Mr. Stewart—your own nephew, Mr. Aymescourt Croft.”

“Am I answerable for the misdeeds of my nephew?” Mr. Stewart inquired; whereupon Mr. Smithers declared he did not know; that perhaps, Mr. Croft had very good reasons for acting as he did, and that it might have been better for all parties concerned if “everybody had sold their shares,” when Lord Kemms repudiated the Protector. Let the argument commence where it would, it always ended in Lord Kemms—it always reverted to the fact that Mr. Black had used his name without authority, and that Mr. Stewart’s noble relative had been the first to damage the Company, as his nephew was the first to dispose of his shares.

The business men on the Direction attributed all the disasters of the Protector to having so many “nobs” on the Board; while the Sirs, and Generals, and gentlemen possessed of landed property conceived it was the City element which had militated against the success of their enterprise.

One singular fact in connection with this subject

may here be noted, namely, that the men who had not paid for their shares at all, such, for example, as Mr. Smithers, General Sinclair, &c., were much more vehement concerning their disappointment than those who really held a large pecuniary stake in the Protector.

It is more difficult, perhaps, to bear with equanimity the loss of hope than the loss of money, and individuals who, like Arthur Dudley, had expected to realise fortunes out of nothing, were much more disheartened by the prospect of failure than persons who, having "paid their shilling, took their risk."

This remark applies only, however, to the directors. The shareholders having, one and all, hoped to realize their ten or twenty, or fifty or a hundred per cent., were as virtuously indignant as those members of the Board who had sold their names for scrip. Speculators all—gamblers as much as the man who stakes his last guinea on a throw of the dice—they were yet neither to hold nor to bind when the speculation turned out ill, when the throw of the dice threatened to leave them minus the money they had invested!

Truth is, shareholders have so long been commi-

serated instead of blamed ; so long represented as victims instead of wilful dupes, that when the crash does come, they are for ever airing their grievances and wearying the public with records of folly that have now grown sickening, by reason of constant repetition.

Any man who, in these days, chooses to invest his savings in business, whether on his own sole risk or in company with other adventurers, has no right to ask for pity if the project fail—if the boat sink. Ostensibly, he took his chance ; if the result be unfavourable to his hopes, he has no right to claim either sympathy or help.

It is the greed of gain, the dislike of legitimate work, the desire for usurious interest, the weak senseless refusal to be guided by the experience of others, which bring misery to families as to individuals. If men are willing to listen to every pleasant tale, to believe any lie which is put on paper, to think that fortune will make an exception in their favour, cause the sun to stand still, and suspend all the ordinary laws of commerce for their benefit, they must take the consequences.

No legislation can protect fools against the results



of their own folly ; no government is bound to find brains for the governed. Shall we pity a man who is deceived by a thimblerrigger, or fleeced by his chatty travelling acquaintance who, on the long northern journey, produces a pack of cards, and proposes a game merely to while away the time ! And, in like manner, shall we, at this age of the world, pity those “clergymen and others,” without whose post-office orders and almost illegibly-signed cheques promoters and Limited Liability Companies would soon have to die a death of sheer inanition, and leave the commercial field open for honest labour—for legitimate competition.

When a tradesman exposes his flannels, and cotton prints, and stout calicos on the pavement, a magistrate is reluctant to convict even the practised thief who walks off with a convenient dress-length secreted under her shawl ; and, in like manner, when at this time of the world, in spite of newspaper exposures, notwithstanding warning “leaders” and magazine articles, and the advice of those whose advice is really worth following, people will risk their money in speculative ventures, shall we be sorry for them ? shall we, like Mr. Raidsford, sing a doleful lamen-

tation over the mites of widows, and the tithes of clergymen ; over the savings of governesses and the rents of country gentlemen ; nay, rather shall we not say with Mr. Stewart, the mouse is the cat's legitimate prey, let promoters devour that substance which is theirs by right.

There is an old saying, that a man is justified in doing what he likes with his own ; and, if a dupe be the personal property of a rogue, why should the rogue not fleece him, even though such a proceeding be disagreeable to the dupe ?

In business, the millionaire and the curate alike must take his chance, only the curate is never willing to do so ; he never bears his pain in such dignified silence as was the case with Compton Raidsford, who, week after week, found that "pressure for money" of which he had spoken to Arthur Dudley, increase so much, that eventually he began to tremble for Moorlands—to believe that the business he had worked so hard to establish was tottering, and that, before long, he should have to place his books in the hands of Messrs. Byrne, Browne, Byrne, and Company, accountants, Old Jewry.

He could not understand it. Never in all his

experience before had money been so difficult to get in—so necessary to pay. Houses that formerly would have trusted him to any amount now absolutely refused to draw upon him at four months. Cash with order was requested in some cases ; and although, at first, Mr. Raidsford had treated such refusals and demands as mere signs of the times, he came before very long to the conclusion that somehow his credit had got damaged—that there was more than accident in the pecuniary pressure which ultimately threatened to crush him to the earth.

In his distress he had no other confidant than Lord Kemms—to no business man dare he have confided his difficulties.

“ I am perfectly solvent,” he repeated over and over again. “ My estate ought to pay 60s. in the pound any day ; and yet now, if you believe me, my Lord, I find a difficulty in getting even a bill discounted. If I could only trace the origin of this universal distrust, I really should not despair ; but as it is, I feel I am fighting in the dark. That there is something being urged against me I am satisfied, but what that something may be I cannot conjecture. I have not speculated ; I have not

taken any unprofitable contracts. I have sedulously steered clear of railways for the last two years. Even that branch which is proposed from South Kemms to Palinsbridge, I have refused to touch. I wonder if I can have been too cautious—if my prudence have been misconstrued!”

Lord Kemms did not know, but professed himself willing to lend Mr. Raidsford whatever amount of money he might at the moment have at his bankers, which offer the contractor declined.

“I do not think, my Lord,” he said, “you know exactly into what sums our transactions run. No amount of money almost could compensate me for the loss of credit. If things go on for another month as they have done for the last three, I shall have to call a meeting. There is no use blinding oneself in a case of this kind.”

No use, indeed, when one half-the City was already talking of Mr. Raidsford's suspension as imminent—when he was spoken of on 'Change as shaky, and words of wisdom were uttered in dingy back offices concerning the fall of the great contractor.

It was while things were in this state, both with the Protector, Limited, and Compton Raidsford,

Unlimited, that one night, by the last post, Arthur Dudley received a letter, which at the first glance utterly astounded him. It was directed in Mr. Black's hand to Arthur Dudley, Esquire; but the enclosure, in feigned writing, was addressed to Messrs. Shields and Montgomery, Solar Foundry, Wolverhampton.

Arthur had mastered the contents of this communication before he comprehended it could not be intended for him. He ran his eye over the few lines it contained hastily, and then examined the envelope; after that he read the letter again, and then, placing letter and envelope together, compared both at his leisure.

"What a d—— shame!" he at length broke out; and he rose straight away, and taking his hat walked forth into the night. He had the letter in his pocket-book, and he strode on like a man who distrusted the strength of his own resolution if he stood still and deliberated about the thing he was resolved to do.

Along Great Queen Street and Long Acre he proceeded rapidly. Taking the most direct routes he soon reached Regent Street, which he crossed; thence

making his way to Bond Street, he commenced threading through the maze of squares that lie in that part of London till he came to the "Place" in which Mr. Raidsford's town house was situated.

He had chosen a most unseasonable hour at which to pay a visit; but Arthur knew that if Mr. Raidsford were at home he should gain admittance. Lights flamed out across the pavement; the house was illuminated as though for a royal marriage; carriages containing merchant princes, their wives and their daughters, were setting down as Mr. Dudley drew near the house.

This was not quite what Arthur had anticipated; but still he held to his resolution, and arrived at the door which Lord Kemms was entering at the moment.

"My Lord," he said; and at the words his former neighbour turned and recognised him.

"You here, Dudley?" he exclaimed. "This is an unexpected pleasure. Shall we go on? we are stopping the way."

"I am not a guest," Arthur answered; "but I want to see Mr. Raidsford particularly. I can wait until he is at leisure, but I must see him. Will you

manage this for me?" he added, entreatingly, feeling, perhaps, that in his walking-dress amongst all that gay company he should stand but a poor chance of inducing any servant to carry his message. Good-natured as ever, Lord Kemms readily consented to do what was required.

"No bad news, I trust," he whispered, as one of the servants was showing Arthur to the library, there to wait Mr. Raidsford's appearance.

"Not bad news, I hope," Arthur answered ; "but, still, news he ought to hear at once."

"I will tell him," Lord Kemms said, and closing the library door he left the secretary marvelling whether such an entertainment could be considered a sign of impending ruin—of pecuniary difficulty.

There had been a time when Arthur would have decided this question in the negative ; but he was wiser now, and knew that in London people feast on the very brink of commercial death, that they gather their friends and give elegant *déjeûners*, and eat with an appetite and enjoy their repast, even though they know next hour Jack Ketch is coming to arrange the noose and hang them by the neck till

all chance of return to respectable West end society is past for ever.

To his country imagination, it was still a fearful and a wonderful thing to see people spending, with poverty stalking gauntly at the heels of pleasure ; but he had acquired sufficient knowledge of town to be at the same time aware three or four hundred pounds seem a mere bagatelle to a man whose liabilities amount to hundreds of thousands.

With affairs going all cross in the City, Mrs. Raidsford, triumphant in satins and jewellery, was "at home" in Huntingdon Place.

If another chance were never to offer itself of airing her bad grammar, and exhibiting her wonderful taste in dress to her rich and grand acquaintances, that was all the more reason why she should avail herself of this opportunity, while opportunity lasted. Only stupid, unsophisticated people like the Dudleys thought of retrenchment before the final crash ; besides, Mrs. Raidsford meant to marry her daughters off, if she could, and all the world knows the best way to secure a desirable husband is to ask a few hundred people to meet and make themselves as uncomfortable as circumstances and



the construction of modern London houses will permit.

All this and much more to the same effect Arthur Dudley had abundant leisure for considering before the door opened and Mr. Raidsford entered.

He made some hurried apology for his delay, and then throwing himself into a chair opposite Arthur, anxiously demanded his business.

Amongst his guests in the drawing-rooms, on the staircase, in the hall, he had been a prosperous-looking, smiling gentleman; now he flung the mask off, and allowed the lines of care to appear in his face, a tone of despairing trouble to lurk in his voice.

"Don't be afraid, man," he said, almost brusquely. "Lord Kemms told me your business concerned me; out with it; I am not a child—I can face the worst—I have seen it coming this many a day."

"Mr. Raidsford," began Arthur, "what you have suffered from has been a loss of credit, I understand; a pressure, as you yourself told me, for money."

"Yes," was the reply; "and when this pressure commenced, I believed my credit to be as good as

that of any man in England ; I believed it to be so good, in fact, that I paid no attention to the pressure for a considerable period—not, in fact, until it became almost like a run on a bank.”

“ And to what cause did you attribute that run ? ” inquired Arthur.

“ I have never been able to attribute it to any cause,” was the reply ; “ I had no heavy losses ; I was engaged in no great ventures ; I was perfectly solvent ; I am solvent, in fact, now ; but still I know I must stop ; I have fought as long as fighting seems of any use ; now I must adopt another plan.”

“ If you were aware of the cause of your loss of credit, would it help you to battle through ? ” asked Arthur.

“ That would depend entirely on the cause,” was the reply.

“ Supposing it were private malice,” Arthur suggested ; “ suppose an enemy to have been at work.”

“ I have not an enemy in the world,” Mr. Raidsford answered.

“ If you read that, perhaps you will alter your opinion,” Arthur remarked, handing him the letter

he had received. "Mr. Raidsford, I could not rest till I had come to you ; I feared my own purpose might undergo a change before morning. I knew it was right you should be told this thing, and yet I hesitated about showing a letter which strictly is none of my property. I shall speak to Black about what I have done ; you know now who has been your enemy, and I trust it may not be too late for you to repair the mischief he has caused."

And with that Arthur left the room, and wended his way back to Lincoln's Inn Fields. He had never liked Mr. Raidsford, and he could not be very cordial to him, even at the moment when he was stretching out his hand to save the contractor from ruin.

He had not done him this service out of good-will, but because right was right, and justice, justice. He had hasted to serve this man, whom he always regarded with jealousy and distrust ; but it was not in Arthur's nature to feel other than bitterly the fact, that while he was able to serve Mr. Raidsford he was unable to extricate himself ; that though Moorlands might be preserved, still Berrie Down was heavily mortgaged.

The very step he had taken, moreover, would, he knew, make his own position more difficult. With Mr. Black for an enemy, what troubles might he not expect to have to face in the future—what about his bills, what about Berrie Down, what about his means of actual subsistence? If a man could, secretly and anonymously, damage another's credit, plot and scheme to beggar a person against whom he had a grudge, watch the growth of his plans through months, and never flinch nor falter in the execution of his purpose, what might Arthur not expect at his hands, after having baulked him in his design?

All that night Squire Dudley lay awake, thinking in what words he should tell Mr. Black he had found him out, exposed his scheme, and defeated his carefully-prepared plot.

He knew exactly how the accident, which put him in possession of Mr. Black's secret, had occurred; and he was well aware, in due time, the letter intended for him would be returned by Messrs. Shields and Montgomery to Dowgate Hill; but he resolved not to wait for that *dénouement*—instead of doing so, he started next morning, directly after breakfast,

or the City, where Mr. Black received him with his usual easy flow of language.

"Well, and how is the 'Protector?'" was his greeting; "anything new? I think things were a shade better on the market yesterday, and I have some applications this morning from parsons about shares in the 'Universal.' Discount is down a half, too. By-the-bye, you got my letter, I suppose? There is no help for it, Dudley, we must renew those confounded bills again. You noticed what I said about knowing a fellow willing to do them?"

"I did not," answered Arthur, "for the simple reason that I suppose the letter you meant to send to me is now at Wolverhampton,"

"What the devil do you mean?"

There was no sham about Mr. Black's tone or manner as he put this question. For the first time, perhaps, during all the years he had known him, Arthur beheld the actual man, and the actual man was not pleasant to behold.

"Messrs. Shields and Montgomery's letter came in my envelope," the secretary explained.

"Indeed! And what have you done with that letter?"

"I took it last night to Mr. Raidsford."

For a moment Arthur thought his kinsman was going to strike him. Mr. Black made a step forward towards his visitor, and lifted his clenched hand, but next instant he let it drop heavily on the table while he asked—

"Pray, Mister Squire Dudley, was that your idea of honour?"

"Yes, Mr. Black, it was, strictly," Arthur replied.

"And how much did he give you for the information?—come now, be frank. I would have outbid him, had you played your cards well. What was the figure? Did you go cheap? I'll be sworn you did. I'll bet ten to one you sold yourself as well as me. Oh! you won't answer—you are sulky. You are going to deprive me of the pleasure of your honourable, and gentlemanly, and intellectual society! Curse you!" added the promoter, suddenly changing his sneering tone for one of the intensest fury, "curse you, for a skulking, sneaking, timid fool, who has not even sense enough to enjoy seeing a man who ruined us ruined likewise! I'll be even with you yet. I'll make you rue the day you meddled in my concerns, and spoiled my game. Do you hear me, Dudley?"

he shouted across the outer office ; “look to yourself!”

“I intend,” was Arthur Dudley’s reply, as he walked into the street, knowing he was a ruined man.

He did not return to Lincoln’s Inn Fields for some hours—not, in fact, until after he had seen a solicitor, and laid the exact state of his affairs before that gentleman.

Now the worst had come, he felt equal to face it. He felt it was better to know the extent of his liabilities, and to take immediate measures for breaking off all dealings with the man who had led him so terribly astray.

For every scrap of paper to which he had ever attached his name, he was liable. His shares, he knew, were not worth sixpence ; the whole of his property would barely suffice to pay his debts ; Berrie Down must go, and also the house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. This was the end of the dreamer’s vision—this was the fortune he had come to London to seek ! Beggary !

His salary depended on the life of the “Protector,” and that was scarcely expected to survive from day to day. Heather would have to be

told now—Heather, whose love he had grown to value too late—Heather, whom he had thrust from him that night when she knelt beside his chair, pleading to be unto him an helpmeet! Would she reproach him—would she ask if he had married her to bring her to this? No!—he knew she never could be so unlike the sweet Heather of old as to taunt him with his misfortunes; but would she be cold; would she be hard and unsympathetic; would she merely bear and leave him to bear also? If he only could have been sure of her, Arthur, walking about the lanes and alleys of the City, thought he should not have cared so much!

He had despised the crutch in his days of strength and independence; and now, when he was lame, he stretched forth his hand to touch some support in vain.

When late in the afternoon he reached Lincoln's Inn, he found Mr. Stewart, Mr. Harcourt, and two strangers in the office.

At a glance he knew something disagreeable had happened, and, before five minutes were over, he was informed the cashier, recommended by Mr. Stewart himself, had been embezzling the moneys



of the Company ; that he, Mr. Black and Mr. Robert Crossenham, and Mr. Bayley Crossenham, the latter trading under the firm of "Stack and Son, Corn Factors, Mark Lane," had all been playing into each other's hands, buying wheat which never was delivered, charging it to the "Protector" and dividing the proceeds thus obtained.

"We want to look at the register, if you please, Mr. Dudley," said Mr. Stewart, with a terrible politeness.

"There," he remarked, turning to Mr. Harcourt, when Arthur had produced the book required, "it is as I thought ; and now we shall not have even the poor satisfaction of transporting him. Mr. Dudley, I should have thought that *even you* might have concluded there was something wrong when a clerk bought shares in a sinking concern ;" and, with this remark, which was so much Hebrew to Arthur, Mr. Stewart said, "good evening," and went off with the strangers he had brought with him.

"What is it all about?" Arthur asked of Mr. Harcourt, when they were left alone.

"There has been wholesale robbery," was the reply, "and the Company will have to be wound up."

“And why can they not prosecute Graham?”

“Because, being a shareholder, he is a partner, and a man cannot legally embezzle his own property. It is a bad business, a very bad business!” added Mr. Harcourt. “I am afraid Mr. Black is a thorough-paced scoundrel.”

“I know he is,” said Arthur; but the fact of his knowledge did not make matters any the better for him or for the Protector.

After the clerks were gone, and Mr. Harcourt had departed, Arthur still sate alone in his office, looking his misery in the face. Twice Tifford had been good enough to inform the secretary that dinner was ready, but Arthur took no notice of the summons.

How to go upstairs and see Heather—how to tell her the game was over, and that it had left him a beggar, he could not imagine. What were his dreamings in the old days, speeding down to Palinsbridge, and planning to communicate the fact of a thousand a-year being added to their income, to this?

Coldness and doubt had not visited Heather; Mrs. Croft had not aroused her jealousy; Lally was still with her, and he had not then neglected his

child. Poor Lally, poor little Lally! The man's heart must have been very heavy that night, for, sitting in the firelight, the tears dropped down from his eyes, one by one, as he sat thinking of his living wife and his dead child.

If only the past could come back again, how differently he would act! if only Heather would be to him the wife of old, he might still make a struggle and conquer Fortune yet.

Twice that day Arthur had found his level; had seen in what estimation people held his talents; and, in the years gone by, he had estranged from him the woman who believed him perfect—who was unto him, in the old, happy time at Berrie Down, though he recked not then of his blessing, more than silver or gold, Far above Rubies.

While he was thinking, Heather herself opened the door, and glided up to where he sat. For weeks previously she had been trying to draw nearer to her husband, seeking for an opportunity to pray for "forgiveness," Lord help her, "for her selfish sorrow;" and now, in the firelight, she came and laying her hand on his shoulder, said,—

"Is anything the matter, Arthur? Are you ill?"

are you vexed? I have sent Tifford twice to tell you dinner is ready."

"I do not want any dinner," he answered. "I have had meals enough for one day—meals enough to destroy any man's appetite. The 'Protector' is going to be wound up, Heather, and my salary will be stopped, of course."

She hesitated for a moment before replying, then she said, "I am very sorry for your sake, dear, for you hoped to make so much out of it. We must return to the Hollow, I suppose."

"I must sell the Hollow," he answered; and then, in a few hurried sentences, he told her all—his folly, his credulity, his disappointed hopes, his ruin.

He kept nothing back; and when he had quite finished, when there was nothing more to add to the dreary recital of loss and misfortune, he paused, listening for what she should say, for how she should receive his confession.

For a moment there was silence—a silence so great that the falling of the cinders on to the hearth alone broke the stillness.

"Will she reproach me," he wondered; "will she be angry at last? will she say nothing, and refuse

pity to me, though she can give it to every other created being?"

"Have you not a word to speak to me, Heather?" he asked at last; and then the tears she had been striving to keep back burst forth, and flinging her arms around his neck, she sobbed out,—

"Oh, my love, my love!" and as she lay on his breast Arthur understood that he was to her, in that hour of bitter distress, dearer than the lover of her girlhood, than the husband of her youth.

## CHAPTER XI.

## FORGOTTEN.

THE "Protector" had been dead for two years. Its very name was a memory. Lawyers who had assisted in holding a legal inquest over its remains—directors who had been badgered to death concerning its failure—people who had lost money or made money by it, recollected that there had once been such a Company; but the grass was growing green above its grave—in law courts and the Stock Exchange. So many similar ventures had lived, and prospered, and died in the time, that its history had become an old, old tale, which was never now repeated save here and there by one who had lost money through it.

Summer was come once again, and in the close streets round about Bethnal Green and Spitalfields

the hot sultry air which met any adventurous explorer who bravely pursued his way into those almost unknown regions, seemed like the breath issuing from the mouth of some sulphurous pestilent volcano. The thousand and one smells of the East of London assailed his nostrils, the sights and sounds of that most wretched locality offended his eyes and ears.

Few people who were not called thither by business or necessity jostled the rightful inhabitants in the streets ; but it is to the east of Bishopsgate Street Without I must, nevertheless, with all due apology for even hinting at the existence of such a neighbourhood, conduct my reader to Silk Street, so named, no doubt, in olden times, on account of the number of silk-weavers who abode there.

It had once been a thoroughfare of no small importance ; but its glory had faded, its trade fallen away, although the railway waggons thundered through it, and the noise of passing carts and cabs never stopped, never from morning till night. It was a mean, poor street, composed principally of dilapidated-looking three-storey houses, in the windows of which were exhibited here fruit and vegetables, there

drapery goods, and again furniture of the stalest, poorest, commonest description. Towards the end of the thoroughfare, however, there were erected some new warehouses and stores.

Contrasting gloomily with their bright red-brick fronts was the gateway which gave ingress to Mr. Lukin's silk-weaving factory.

A gloomy, disreputable gateway, affording admittance up a narrow cart-road into a wider court-yard beyond, one side of which was occupied by a packing-shed and a carpenter's shop ; another by the weaving-factory, and a third by the dwelling of the manager ; the only picturesque things about the place being the windlass and buckets belonging to a disused well.

We must pass in, if you please, for Arthur Dudley is the manager, and this is his house.

There are high walls all round the court-yard ; high walls blackened with smoke, unrelieved by tree, or ivy, or climbing Virginian creeper.

Heather is planning to cover them with greenery, but her attempts have hitherto proved abortive ; the shrubs all die like the plants in her ghostly, little garden, where she can get nothing but double red daisies and stocks and pinks to grow.



A change this from Berrie Down, you say ! Certainly ; but life is full of changes, and Arthur Dudley has still much to learn.

The world's educational establishments are not always pleasant places at which to reside ; the playgrounds are oftentimes contracted, and the diet not suited to delicate palates ; but the lessons taught in those seminaries of practical learning prove oftentimes much more useful than the pleasant tasks conned beside the singing river, under the rustling trees.

As for Heather, there is no life perfect ; yet it may be doubted whether she was very unhappy in those days of pecuniary struggle, of pinching economy. The high walls which seemed to be closing her in were, perhaps, the most active trouble of her life. Sometimes she felt as if she were in a prison, as if she were a thousand miles from every one, as if she should die for want of air, as though, if a fire were to break out, she should never reach the gates alive.

At all of which fancies Arthur laughed, and then Heather laughed ; and then the two, in the summer evenings, would water their tiny bit of garden-ground,

and talk about the far-away country, which it almost seemed as though they were never to behold again.

Entirely owing to Arthur's pride. Heather could not blind herself to this fact, although she sedulously refrained from touching upon it.

When Berrie Down was sold, the gentleman who bought it offered Arthur two hundred and fifty pounds a year and a free house, if he would take the management of the farm, but Arthur refused.

There was a situation open for him, he said, of five hundred a year in London, and he would never be servant where he had been master; so the proprietor took "no" for an answer, and passing on to Alick secured his services for one-half the sum and the use of Berrie Down House and farm produce, till such time as the proprietor should require the residence from him. Two of the girls resided with the young steward, but Agnes remained with Heather; Cuthbert had left the Messrs. Elser, and was now receiving a good salary from Mr. Raidsford. Altogether the family prospects were brighter than of old, excepting as regarded Arthur, who had steadily fallen from height to height, till at length he found himself cashier and bookkeeper, and yard-

keeper and general manager to Mr. Lukin, who had great works in the North, and was reported to be enormously rich.

If he were so, Arthur did not derive much benefit from his wealth, for he had but two hundred a year ; while Simons, the actual though sub-manager, thought himself fortunate to receive two pounds a week.

Certainly Arthur's duties were light—to take money and pay it into the bank—to write a report of how business progressed to his employer—to keep the books, and see to things generally. There was no great hardship or difficulty involved in these and such like matters ; and yet Arthur was now as of old at Berrie Down, a wretched man.

He had a trouble dogging his footsteps, and that trouble was debt. After paying off the most of his liabilities, and leaving himself without a sixpence in the world, he was still five hundred pounds deficient, and five hundred pounds to a man who is trying to live respectably on two hundred a year is, with a pressing creditor, almost equivalent to utter bankruptcy.

His friends would have helped him had they

known of his grievous strait ; but Arthur's was not a temper to take help or pecuniary assistance from any one on earth. With all his heart, Mr. Raidsford desired to show his gratitude to the man who had saved him from ruin ; but when he came to press offers of money, offers of situations, high salaries, and so forth, on Arthur's acceptance, the poor gentleman drew himself up, and made the contractor feel he had made a mistake—that Arthur Dudley of Silk Street very much resembled Arthur Dudley of Berrie Down, only that he was a degree prouder than of old.

Mr. Croft, also, more earnestly desired to do something for his friend ; but he was repelled haughtily by Arthur, and also, though more gently, by Heather.

As for Mr. Black, in answer to the solicitor who, on Arthur's behalf, waited on him concerning those bills for which Squire Dudley was legally liable, he said plainly, he never would find sixpence towards helping Dudley out of the mess into which he had got himself.

“ If he had stuck to me, I should have stuck to him,” the promoter answered ; “ but he would go fishing on his own hook, and if he have come to grief, he has nobody to blame but himself.”

Mrs. Ormson and the Marsdens, of course, ignored the very existence of such people as the Dudleys; and, when they were unhappily mentioned, laid the blame of all Arthur's misfortunes at the door of the "woman he married." As for Miss Hope, from foreign parts, she was sympathetic, but necessarily vague. She did not know in the least how low her nephew had fallen, but hoped, she said, on her return to England, to visit them in their little house, which, spite of all Heather told her concerning its limited accommodation, she had no doubt would be charming, "dear Heather having such a taste in arrangement."

In brief, from all their old haunts, from all their old acquaintances, from all their pursuits, and thoughts, and ideas, the Dudleys had vanished away.

From the former life they had fallen. As a stone drops into the river's depths, so they had sunk to that wretched east-end street, and in the circles in which they once mixed, they were forgotten as a dead man out of mind.

The old servants, too, were gone; they were unable to afford to keep any save Priscilla, and she

after a long illness had come back almost from death to serve her former mistress—never to leave her, she declared to Bessie, who went to see her in the hospital—never to leave her more.

“I always said to Mrs. Piggott, Miss Bessie, I hoped I should die before crinoline went out of fashion, and when there was a talk of them going to be left off, I fell sick; but now I hear it was all nonsense, so I mean to get better, if it was only for the sake of Mrs. Dudley, who says she misses me, Miss Bessie—misses me!”

As for Bessie, she too, unable to remain away from her old friend, had returned from the country farmhouse, and taken up her abode in a street not very far away from that where Heather lived. She was a good and tasteful needlewoman, and earned a tolerable livelihood with her white, pretty fingers.

Many an hour she and Heather spent together while Arthur was busy; but Arthur was not taken into the secret. Even Heather doubted his discretion in the matter, and there were ample reasons why the girl's whereabouts should be known to as few persons as possible.

Ned and Mrs. Piggott were married and settled

in a public-house on the road to South Kemms, where, Alick informed Heather, they did a capital business, and kept a most regular and respectable tavern. "It is quite a little hotel, mother," said the young man, adding, "When shall I be able to persuade you to come down to the Hollow and see how lovely the place looks?" but, in reply, Heather shook her head.

"Naturally, the very name of Berrie Down is painful to Arthur," she answered. "I should like to please you, Alick, but I cannot bear to vex him. His life has been a very hard one, and I ought not to make it any harder."

Then Alick had another project; he would take a house at the sea-side for a month, and Heather, and the girls, and Leonard should all go down and stay there, and he, and Arthur, and Cuthbert would spend their Sundays with them. "It will be like the old times, for us all to be together again," finished the youth; "and, dear Heather, I do want to see you looking a little better;" whereupon she called him a foolish boy, and, drawing his face down to hers, kissed it, saying, "people could be well and happy anywhere, in London as in the country, if

they would only try to be thankful and contented."

But the "foolish boy" resolutely refusing to be either contented or thankful, unless she would agree to his plan, at length, when it was far on in the summer, "between the crops" as he put it, Alick persuaded Heather to make her preparations for leaving home, which she did all the more readily, perhaps, because Arthur agreed to come down on the Saturday nights, and remain with them until the Monday mornings.

"I think the change will do us all good," he said; but there was a look in his face which Heather somehow mistrusted, and which caused her to wonder what could be the matter with Arthur; whether he had any fresh trouble he was keeping from her, or whether he felt ill and would not say so, for fear of spoiling her holiday.

Talking the matter over with Bessie, however, that young person combated her friend's fears successfully. "If Arthur should be ill," she said, "I shall certainly hear of it from Morrison" (Morrison was one of the workmen somewhat devoted to Priscilla, in whom both Heather and Bessie trusted, and it



is only fair to add, he deserved such trust, for the notes they mutually exchanged were never chattered about; the name of the young lady, whom Mrs. Dudley went to see, was never mentioned to any one); "and if I do hear of there being anything the matter," went on Bessie, "I shall certainly go round to nurse him, and telegraph for you; so make yourself happy concerning that dear husband, and pack up your clothes at once."

Which advice Heather followed in a divided frame of mind; divided, because while she longed to see the country, she hated leaving Arthur, who, on the very Saturday of her departure, said he should not be able to accompany her out of town that week, because Mr. Lukin was coming to London, and might be expected in Silk Street at any moment.

"But you must go, dear," he added, "and I will run down through the week, if I possibly can. Come now, get your bonnet on, or we shall be too late at Waterloo;" and thus he hurried her on till they were fairly in a cab, *en route* to the South Western Railway Terminus.

There were Alick and Cuthbert, Lucy and

Laura, all looking as bright and sunshiny as the weather.

“Not coming, Arthur!” exclaimed his brother; “what a shabby trick! I could not have believed you would have served a fellow so!”

“It is not my fault, Alick,” was the reply; “but Mr. Lukin is coming to town, and I must be on the spot to receive him; you will take care of Heather, Alick,” he added, in a lower and a different tone, drawing his brother aside; “you will promise me to take care of her?”

“Take care of Heather!” answered Alick, “I like that; as though I should not take care of her. Do you think I forget, Arthur—do you imagine I could possibly forget, the years during which she was our mother—the best mother ever any boys and girls found?”

“Thank you, I shall be easier now,” Arthur answered; and then he joined the others and kept near his wife till it was time for the little party to enter the compartment, which they quite filled. To the last, Squire Dudley never took his eyes off his wife’s face; and, when the moment of final parting came, he kissed her two or three times over, saying

"God bless you, Heather! think of me sometimes."

When the train moved off, he stood on the platform, looking after the carriage which contained his wife; and as the speed increased, Heather saw a look come over his countenance which filled her with so terrible an alarm, that she cried out in a moment, "Alick, I must go back to Arthur! there is something the matter! I ought never to have come!"

All in vain, they tried to combat her determination; at the first station where the express stopped, Heather alighted, resolved to return to town. She would not hear of Alick travelling with her. "No," she said; "if he be in any trouble, I shall be better to remain alone with him; if not, I will go down to you by the first train on Monday morning. I promise, Alick, faithfully! Do not try to prevent my going home," she pleaded; "remember, once before I wanted to turn back, and Arthur would not let me!"

Which last argument, proving unanswerable, with heavy hearts they allowed her to have her own way, and she went into the waiting-room, where she

stopped for an hour, until the up-express appeared in sight, when she took her seat, together with some other passengers, and was soon tearing back to London, under the glare of the afternoon sun. At the terminus she took a cab for Norton Folgate, from whence she walked on to Silk Street. She had no need to ring the bell, for one of the men coming out at the moment, afforded her entrance, without attracting, in any way, attention to her return.

"I fear I have done a very foolish thing," she thought, as she stepped inside the gateway, and any one else might have thought the same, for Arthur had complained of neither ache nor pain ; he had been in good spirits all the morning ; he had faithfully promised to come down through the week ; and, but for that expression of hopeless, helpless, blank despair in his face as the train swept out of the station, Heather would have gone away happy, and Arthur's fate proved different.

As it was, he had traversed the road back from Waterloo a miserable and a wretched man.

He had brought much grief to Heather, he would bring no more. He had been tempted, and he had fallen ; he had been pressed for money, and he

had "borrowed"—that was the way he put it to himself—a few hundreds from Mr. Lukin, and he had vainly striven to replace those hundreds, and now Mr. Lukin was coming to inspect the books, and a worse thing than poverty—disgrace! was without in the street, waiting to cross their threshold.

But Heather should never know this; no man, nor no woman, should ever say a Dudley of Berrie Down had committed a felony. There was one way of escape, and his feeble mind clutched hold of that poor straw eagerly: one way—he would take care of himself, and Alick would take care of Heather!

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

ONCE inside the house, Heather, all in a flutter, ran up to her own room, and asked herself why she had returned. Even now—even with the consciousness on her that she had done a very foolish thing, at which Arthur would be naturally vexed—she felt she could not have gone on ; that the journey, with that awful dread weighing her down, would have been one of pain instead of pleasure ; that it would be far more a holiday to her—far and away more, to stay behind with her husband—her poor, careworn, miserable husband—than to travel through the loveliest scenery on earth.

She had told Alick it was a feeling, a foolish though uncontrollable feeling, which made her turn back ; but she would have spoken more correctly

had she said it was the love of her heart—that love which is stronger than death, more constant than sorrow.

Yet she knew she never could make Arthur understand this ; knew she never could hope to impress upon him how miserable she had felt after the farewell at the station ; how utterly impossible it was for her to go on and be happy, while he remained behind alone.

How should she tell him ? With a vague desire to break the fact of her return to others before facing her husband, she went downstairs again, and into the kitchen, meaning to tell Prissy, she feared Mr. Dudley would be lonely, and so returned, sending the rest of the family on. She meant to have a comfortable chat with Prissy, for her heart was very full, and she longed to have a good talk with some one ; but, when she entered the kitchen, no Prissy was there ; no Prissy was in the back-kitchen either, nor in the washhouse, nor in the larder, nor in the coal-cellar, for even into that last hiding-place Heather peeped.

Then it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Dudley that there was a terrible look of order about the kitchen ;

about the pots and pans, the plates and dishes ; everything was in its proper position ; the chairs were ranged against the wall, the table had no crockery heaped upon it, there was not even a glass-cloth flung carelessly aside.

What could it mean ? Heather stood considering this question, and all at once her heart gave a great leap ; not of joy, but fear. There was no fire ; the fact had not struck her at first—perhaps because she was then intent on looking for Prissy—now, however, it came home to her, not merely that there was no fire, but that the wood, paper, and coals, were laid ready for lighting ; ready for lighting in both kitchens. A woman must, like Heather, be a practical housekeeper to understand the full significance of such a spectacle

Both fires out ; both laid ready for lighting ; that bespoke premeditation.

Now, premeditation meant, not that Prissy had gone upstairs to dress, and forgotten her fires ; not that Prissy had gone out shopping, and remained to gossip ; not that Prissy had met her lover, who made time pass so pleasantly, that minutes and fuel were alike forgotten ; but that Prissy had gone out with



leave to do so granted, and that she had conscientiously waited to put the house into apple-pie order before her departure.

One of Heather's greatest comforts, in leaving home, had been the idea that Prissy would see that her husband wanted for nothing ; that she would be always on guard, always at hand to get him whatever he wanted.

Mrs. Dudley had arranged that Prissy's mother was to come up by the late train that night, and keep her company while the family were away ; and the very last words she spoke, before leaving home, were, "Don't forget, Prissy, to write to me often ; and if Mr. Dudley should be ill, I depend upon your sending for me ;" in answer to which Prissy said, "I will see to everything, mum, as if you was at home ; and I'll write every two days, and never be out of the house till you come back."

After that, to return and find the bird flown, was rather disheartening. Mrs. Dudley could not unravel the enigma, and she thereupon slowly ascended the stairs, wondering as she went what it all could mean.

She passed her own room, and wending her way

up another flight of stairs, entered that belonging to Prissy. There, on the foot of the bed, hung the girl's cotton gown, her apron, and various other articles of apparel which Heather recognized at a glance as her every-day habiliments.

With an awful creeping dread upon her, Heather opened the door of the closet where Prissy hung up her gown, and found, not the girl's best dress, bonnet, and shawl, but empty pegs—a fearful vacancy.

What could it all mean? She looked again around the apartment, and perceived Prissy's box was gone. Clearly, her trusty domestic had departed, not merely for the afternoon but for a longer period.

With a sense of suffocation on her, Heather walked to the small window which was partially open, and stood there wondering what she should do next.

The state of the house increased her difficulty as to the best means of explaining her return to Arthur. Supposing he had made any arrangement with which her presence would interfere; supposing it should seem as though she had come back to play the part of a spy, to be a torment instead of a

blessing ; what could he say, what was there he might not imagine ?

That Prissy ever left the house of her own good will, Heather's understanding refused to credit ; and why Arthur should have sent her away, Heather likewise could not comprehend.

If she had done anything wrong, and been discharged, she would have taken all her clothes ; if she had not done anything wrong, why did Arthur let her go ? Over this question, Heather, still with her bonnet on, stood puzzling ; and, as she stood, she saw the men leave off work and don their coats, and pass out of the 'yard ; at first, in gangs, afterwards in twos and threes—finally, one by one.

There they went—foremen, overlookers, clerks, sub-manager ; finally, Arthur went down to the gate, talking to Morrison as they walked.

At the gate Morrison paused and seemed impressing something earnestly on Mr. Dudley, to which the latter listened with an appearance of interest. Then Arthur replied ; and, at length satisfied, as it seemed, Morrison touched his hat, and passed through the gate, while Arthur looked after him. As he came up the yard, Heather, from her post of

observation, could see his face distinctly ; that face which had struck her girlish fancy, but which was now so changed—so changed ! oh, God !

As she looked at him, and remembered the first day they had ever set eyes on one another, the tears came welling up, and for a moment she could not see him because of the mist which blinded her.

Poor Arthur ! Poor Arthur ! In the after days it was a comfort to her to recollect that at that moment there came no thought of selfish pity into her mind for poor Heather. Poor Heather ! changed and broke too.

If he had suffered, had not she ? if he had borne, had not she ? if he had found his cross almost heavier than he could endure, had not hers also bowed her to the very ground ? had not she wept her tears, and fought with her anguish ? Yea, truly ; and yet Heather, looking at that pale, worn, haggard man, who came slowly lounging up the yard, thought of none of these things, but only of the blasted hopes, of the proud, disappointed, broken heart of the husband of her youth.

The sunlight, flaring down into the court-yard, shone full upon his face as he walked back from the

entrance gates, swinging the great key on his forefinger ; and Heather, sheltered from observation by the window-curtain, looked down on the man she had returned to comfort, not knowing exactly what to do—in what terms to announce her change of purpose.

The expression on his countenance, which had so struck her while the train moved out of the station, was on his countenance still. He was all alone, as he thought, now ; with no need to put on a mask, with no necessity to smile, or speak, or deceive ; and as Heather, watching him, beheld that look of misery deepen and deepen, while he walked so slowly back, an awful dread took possession of her—a dread of something being about to happen which made her tremble as though in an ague-fit.

He was now beside the well—an old-fashioned one, with rope and windlass, up which the men had in former days drawn buckets of water, but now neglected and disused. It had long been covered over for fear of accidents, and though the boards had shrunk one from another with the heat of many summers, still the planking was secure enough to render all dread of accident unnecessary.

Beside this well, Arthur now paused for a moment, apparently irresolute ; then he stooped, and through the stillness the sound of a splash, of something falling down, and then touching water, ascended to where Heather stood.

At that moment she could not have moved had it been to save her life ; but she could watch, and she did, to see Arthur rise with a face from which even despair was blotted out ; for despair implies a certain ability left to wrestle against, or, at all events, to feel utter hopelessness ; but now, the sun looked down upon a man who had passed even that stage, who had gone through his last struggle, cast his last die.

It was with the expression of a person already dead, Arthur turned from the well and walked across the courtyard, with the key no longer swinging on his forefinger.

What could he be intending to do ? Heather dropped on her knees beside the window, and watched him enter the carpenter's shop. She dared not have met him then. There came upon her such an access of terror when she heard that key splash into the water, as swept everything else out of her

heart for the time being, save the most unconquerable, abject fear—a fear which prevented her even thinking, which took away the power of putting two and two together, and conceiving what project it might be Arthur had in hand.

She was like one in a dream—with a great horror on her, she fell on her knees and watched. Through it all, there was a vague, night-mare kind of consciousness that she and Arthur were locked up alone together—that escape for either of them was not possible—that if help were needed, help was now unattainable.

In her despair she prayed. Holding on by the window-sill as if she were going to be torn from it, she framed some sort of petition to God to help her. Wearied and exhausted, frightened, and with that awful, vague, nameless dread at length taking a tangible form, it seemed to her as though, for a moment, everything faded from her eyes—as though, even while her lips were moving and her heart uttering some terrified words of supplication, her senses left her for a moment—the yard swam round, the buildings went up and down before her sight, the sunlight turned to darkness, and then——

Then, as if, after having been swung out into space for an immeasurable distance, she came back to the same point again—and the mist melted away, and the light was clear once more ; and with a keen vision, though still with a giddy and confused feeling in her head, Heather beheld Arthur coming out of the carpenter's shop, dragging a bag of shavings after him, which he shot out into one of the lower floors of the silk factory.

Still she watched him. He piled shavings, sackful after sackful, among the bales of raw silk—he carried the old wrapperings and more shavings into the counting-house—she saw him bring jars of oil and turpentine and empty them on the heap he had already collected.

“He has gone mad,” she decided, rising up ; “he has gone mad, and he is going to set the place on fire ; and we cannot get out, and there is no help to be obtained.”

None, for they were locked in. She dared not go downstairs and beat at the gates, for she felt more afraid now of encountering Arthur than even of remaining where she was.

Oh ! those cruel walls, those dead, eyeless, earless



walls, to which she might scream herself hoarse in vain—this solitude in the midst of numbers—this helplessness, with help within a few feet of her—this prison without a gaoler—this cage in which they were both about to be burned to death.

Well enough she knew that if once the factory caught fire, no living creature could long breathe within that confined space. It would be like trying to exist in a brick oven with a furnace alight at the one end. Already she seemed to feel the hot tongues of flame licking her cheek—already the struggle for life, dear life, appeared to have begun—already the scorching heat was drying up her blood—already she was beating against the closed gates, beating with her clenched hands till they were bruised and bleeding, while the fire raged behind, and the air became hotter and hotter, the flames fiercer and fiercer.

Already the horror she had often felt of fire in that enclosed place seemed to have become a tangible reality; and, with a low cry, Heather rushed from the room, and down the staircase.

A moment before Arthur had come back across the yard, instinctively she knew for matches. Another

second and it would be too late ; all fear of meeting him was gone ; all fear, save the dread of an awful death for both ; and so she flew down the stairs and met him as he came out of his own apartment, with a box of vestas in his hand.

She need not have feared meeting him ; all the dread she had felt was as nothing compared to the terror which came into his face at sight of his wife. They had changed places now, and it was she, not he, who was strong and mad ; in her frenzy, she struck the box out of his hand, and it fell over the banisters, the matches scattering on the floor-cloth below. Then she threw herself upon him, and asked if he knew what it was he had been about to do. With passionate sobs she prayed him to stay his hand, and to spare them both. Scarcely knowing what she said, she asked what could have tempted him to such a deed ; if he were insane to think of committing so great a sin. With her arms twined around him, and her words flowing fast and unpremeditated, she poured out all her dread, her trouble, her horror, in a few hurried sentences.

She might as well have spared her remonstrances and her entreaties. From the moment he beheld

his wife, all hope of escape, honourable escape, even by death, from the position in which he had placed himself, vanished. He had laid his plans so well, as he thought; and behold, in a moment, her love overthrew them all! While she, clinging to him, went on praying and pleading, weeping and sobbing, all this passed through the man's mind. For the time, he had been stunned, cowed, as though he had met a phantom; but now, pushing her from him, with a sudden force which made her stagger and reel, he disengaged himself from her, and backing into the room he had just left, locked and bolted the door behind him.

"Arthur!" she cried; but there came no answer. "Arthur!" she only heard him walking across the floor.

"Arthur!" she shook the handle, and put her knee against the panel.

"Arthur! for God's sake open the door, and let me speak to you!" still no reply.

Would he drop out by the window, and so escape and finish the work he had begun? She ran downstairs and out of the house; but the sash was not lifted. Would he try to fire the place from within?

She returned to the door, and beat against it, crying, "only a word, dear ; only one word."

And in reply there came something which sounded like a gurgle and a sob, followed by a heavy fall, which seemed to shake the house to its very foundation.

"Arthur!"—there was dead silence. "Arthur!" there was not even a breath in answer ; nothing but silence—a silence which might be felt.

She knelt down and tried to look through the keyhole, but could distinguish nothing. As she rose, she chanced to look down at her light muslin dress, and saw that there was blood upon it—blood oozing under the door, trickling in a narrow stream out upon the landing.

She ran back the whole width of the lobby, and flung herself against the door ; but of what avail was her poor strength ? Then she rushed out upon the roof of the house, with a vague intention of pulling up the ladder after her, and fleeing over other roofs for help and succour ; but the inexorable walls rose high above ;—there were no means of escape, there was no chance of assistance.

Then she sped down the stairs once more—down

the stairs and past the landing where there was already a dark pool of blood forming outside the door. She crossed the yard to the carpenter's shop, and, seizing a hammer, ran to the outer gates, and struck blow after blow, striving to break the lock ; she called and cried, but the people sweeping by never heard her, for the noise of passing conveyances deadened a voice already hoarse with excitement, exhausted with fear. She beat against the solid wood, and her blows were but woman's blows, faint, and feeble, and weak ; she screamed for help, but there was no one to hear.

In her anguish, in that awful extremity of her life, she looked once again round the yard ; and, as she did so, her eye fell on the factory bell, which hung suspended on the highest point of the building.

That was her last hope ; desperately, almost, she flung aside the useless hammer, and sprung to the bell ; she seized the rope with her soft, white hands, and clang, clang, clang, went the clapper—clang, clang, clang.

Through the summer evening's air, through the gathering twilight, the bell rang out—clang, clang ; cling, clang, clang ; the arms never grew tired, the

hands never felt the blistering of the rope. Clang, clang; Heather never ceased till she heard a knocking at the gate, and the police inquiring what was the matter?—"who's inside?"

Thrice Heather tried to answer them, but her lips refused to utter any articulate sound.

Then, "Break open the gate!" she at length managed to reply. "Make haste!—make haste!"

They sent for picks and crowbars, and beat in the wood-work; when that was done a couple of policemen stepped inside, whilst a couple more kept the crowd back.

"Come upstairs!" Heather said; and when they reached the landing, she pointed to the floor, and then to the room, where some tragedy, she knew, had taken place.

"It is locked!" she replied. "My husband!"

One of the men put his shoulder to the door and forced it open. He could not fling it wide, on account of something which barred the entrance; but, squeezing himself through the aperture, he entered the room, and found Arthur lying on the floor with his throat cut, and a razor beside him!

"Bear a hand here," the man whispered to his

fellow, "and don't let her come in;" but Heather was not to be kept back. She crept through the opening likewise, and stood face to face with that, the visible presence of the dread which had brought her back miles and miles to preserve him from one crime only—so it seemed to her—in order that he might commit another!

Between them, the men lifted the body and placed it on the bed; then one went for a doctor, and the other stood waiting for Mrs. Dudley, who had gone groping after a light.

She knew where there were matches, and she soon found a candle; and when she had lighted it, she returned, and, bravely enough, looked on the face of the only man she ever loved.

"I don't think he's dead, ma'am," said the policeman, with a rough sympathy. "I have been trying to stop the bleeding; and, if you will give me some more handkerchiefs, I'll see what we can do till the doctor comes."

Mechanically, almost, Heather gave him what he asked for. Even in the midst of this tremendous sorrow, she could not shut out the memory of all those upheaped shavings, soaked in oil—of all, per-

haps, those terrible men, now they were free of the premises, might discover.

If he were dead, he had left it all—the shame, the discovery, the punishment behind ; but if he were not dead, and that detection then took place ?

Had it not been for the fact of the door being secured inside, the man would have begun to suspect strange things of Heather ; her manner was so singular, so wandering, so incomprehensible.

“Do you know how this happened ?” he asked.

“He went mad, I think,” she answered. “I am sure he was mad ; he has been odd, and unlike himself for some time ;” and then she began to sob convulsively.

“Come, come, ma’am, you must not give way like this, you know,” said the doctor, who just then entered the apartment. “Take charge of her, will you ?” he added, to a person who followed him in, “and don’t allow her to come back here at present. There, ma’am, pray go with this gentleman ; we’ll see to whatever is necessary ; you will only be in our way.”

“That is quite true, Mrs. Dudley,” said a familiar voice, tenderly and pityingly, and, at the sound of it, Heather looked up.



“Oh ! Mr. Croft,” she cried, at sight of his dark face, bent down towards her with an ineffable compassion ; “thank God—thank God for this !” and, clinging to his arm, she rather took him, than he her ; out of the apartment, and into one of the lower rooms, where her first prayer was that “he would keep the people out—keep them away—till she had told him everything—ev-e-ry thing !”

In a few minutes, Douglas Croft was in possession of the facts of the case, so far as Heather herself was cognisant of them, but his clear head saw farther than she had been able to do. He understood there must be some cause for this sudden freak of madness—some reason why Arthur wished the place destroyed.

“And we shall have to find out the reason before morning,” he said. “Now, Mrs. Dudley, may I depend upon your calmness—may I be certain of your assistance ? There has evidently been more than life involved in this matter, and we must sift it thoroughly to the bottom. I suppose I may examine any papers I find upstairs ? Pray remain here for the present ; I shall be back again directly.”

It was no very difficult undertaking for a man

like Douglas Croft to satisfy the police that anything which had happened in Lukin's factory during the course of the last few hours was perfectly correct, and in the ordinary course of every-day events, and that the only plan now to be adopted was to send for a locksmith, have a new fastening put upon the gates, and the needful repairs in the woodwork effected without delay.

Neither did he experience any greater trouble in making the doctor understand that there was something which had preceded the attempt at suicide, and which it was desirable on all accounts to attribute to temporary insanity.

"Whether he live or die," finished Mr. Croft, "and, in my opinion, it matters very little which he does, this freak must be regarded as that of a lunatic. Meantime, if you have no objection to meeting my friend Mr. Rymner Henry, I think it might be a satisfaction to Mrs. Dudley to know you have had a consultation."

In reply to which speech, Doctor Milworth, bowing low, expressed himself to the effect, that he had no objection whatever to meeting Mr. Henry—that he should like to meet him, in fact, which may seem

the less astonishing, perhaps, when it is explained, that during the entire time Doctor Milworth took charge of the case, he was in the habit of going about among his other patients, watch in hand, and casually remarking he was rather in a hurry to-day, because he had to meet Mr. Rymner Henry at a quarter past two, or a quarter to five, or four precisely, according to the hour mentioned by that celebrated surgeon, "in consultation on a most important case."

Why Mr. Croft considered it necessary to send for further advice, he himself perhaps could not very clearly have told, for he knew that if Arthur Dudley were to live, Dr. Milworth had done everything which could be done towards compassing that object. Possibly he might have some idea of thereby winning the doctor's greater confidence, ensuring his greater secrecy, for already Douglas Croft held in his hand a letter which he believed would prove a clue to all this mystery.

It was from Mr. Lukin, stating that on the 23rd he should be in London to *inspect the books*.

"That is the secret, then," thought Douglas Croft; "before you inspect the books, though, Mr.

Lukin, I will take a look at them myself. I do not think there will be much difficulty in unravelling the skein ; I am greatly mistaken if he possessed brains sufficient to cook his accounts, and perhaps for that very reason he may have got them into a confounded mess."

When Mr. Croft, however, tried to pass into the office he failed to do so, by reason of the piles of shavings and other combustible materials which stopped the entrance.

"I want a reliable man, Mrs. Dudley," he said, returning to her ; "a man who can be trusted to hold his tongue, if he be paid for doing so. Is there amongst the workpeople such a treasure to be found?"

"Yes," she answered ; "Morrison. I am certain we may trust him."

"Where is he to be found?" asked her friend.

"I do not know his address, though I could find my way to his house. I will go and fetch him this moment."

"I will accompany you," he said ; but next moment, remembering some one in the Dudley interest ought to remain on the premises, he stood perplexed and silent, while Heather said,—

"I am not afraid of going. Do you think, after to-night, any small thing will ever frighten me again?"

"Poor child, poor child," he murmured, "what a life yours has been!"

"Don't pity me," she said; "do not, or my heart will break; it feels almost breaking as it is, and a kind word chokes me. I will go for Morrison; I will go at once."

There was no help for it; so he went with her as far as the gate and watched her while she flitted away along the street—watched her till she turned a corner and was lost to view.

Then he went upstairs again to hear how the patient was doing, and after a chat with the doctor and nurse, for whom the doctor had sent, walked down to the gates again, and waited till Heather entered, bringing Morrison with her.

"A nice business this!" remarked Mr. Croft, when Mrs. Dudley had left the two men standing together in the yard; "a nice business it might have turned out. Where could your eyes have been not to see Mr. Dudley was as mad as a March hare when you left off work? If it had not been for Mrs. Dudley,

there would have been a fine bonfire here to-night."

"Well, sir, my mind did misgive me," was the reply; "and more especially along of these here shavings. I told Mr. Dudley they were not safe stowed away in that there carpenter's shop, with the gas escaping like anything. I wanted to have them cleared out, and offered to wait and see it properly done, but he said he wanted to go out and could not have them moved till Monday. He looked real down wild when he said it, and my mind misgave me; but I never thought of him trying such a start as this."

"Mr. Lukin will be here on Monday, and you can tell him all about it, just as it happened," said Mr. Croft; "but don't let the men get hold of his having tried to fire the place. It would not be pleasant for poor Mrs. Dudley."

"Which a real lady is," finished Morrison; "many a time I was sorry to see her here, so unsuitable it seemed. Never fear, sir, nobody shall hear the story from me, not even Mr. Lukin. I need not tell him Mrs. Dudley came for me; and when we get these things out of the way, and the place to rights a bit, no one need be any the wiser."

"And, as I cannot find any of the keys, I shall take the books in for security, if you will hand them to me," said Mr. Croft. And so he had the books carried across the yard and placed on the dining-room table, where in five minutes he discovered the deficiency.

"If I can only now open the safe, we may snap our fingers at Mr. Lukin," thought Heather's friend, as he closed the books and shut in the record of the borrowed money which had almost overturned Arthur's reason.

Then he sought Mrs. Dudley, who was seated in an arm-chair, resting her head on both hands. And before her on the table lay a little locket, which Mr. Croft recognised as having been taken from the poor broken creature who, still hanging between life and death, was quiet enough upstairs—quiet enough and low enough to have contented his enemy, if he had one.

"You are very ill, I fear," Mr. Croft said, in that almost caressing tone which had won its way to Bessie's heart in the sunshiny days that seemed now so far—so far away. He possessed two natures, this man, who had loved the girl so passionately and

deceived her so grossly: one tender and compassionate, the other reckless and cynical. "You are very ill, I fear; in the press of other matters you have been neglected. Let me see to you now a little—what is there you can have, likely to do you any good?"

"I do not know," she answered. "I have been upstairs and seen him. Oh! Mr. Croft, what are the chances of his recovery? tell me the truth. It is not likely the doctor would be frank with me."

"I think it greatly depends on his being kept quiet; there is nothing now that ought to distress or worry him. I have discovered the cause of all this misery; it is a very trifling cause indeed which has produced such results."

"Is it?" she lifted her head for a moment as she said this, and looked into Mr. Croft's face, then her glance wandered towards the locket. He could not quite comprehend her.

"A mere trifle," he repeated; and then he told her all. He thought it best to do this—better that she should understand the whole of the circumstances clearly, so as to be able to comprehend exactly how he intended setting the affair straight.



“And I had that money of yours in the house all the time,” Heather said, with that weary, weary look in her face which seemed to Mr. Croft worse than the most violent sorrow—“what you gave me, you know, to keep—for—Bessie!”

The last word was spoken more like an exclamation than as though it had belonged in any way to the previous part of the sentence; and Mr. Croft, following the direction of her eyes, beheld the door closed hurriedly, and heard the rustle of a dress in the passage.

In a moment he was out in the hall, and had caught the retreating figure.

“Bessie!” he cried; “Bessie—Bessie! don’t go! I will leave, if you object to my staying here, but we can both help Mrs. Dudley. See, I will not follow you in!”

She covered her face with the corner of her shawl, covered it that he might not even look upon her, and passed back into the parlour without a word. “Heather, my darling, what is this?” she asked. “Morrison came round for me, but could only give the most confused account of what had happened. Tell me, love—tell me all; don’t sit looking at me

like that, but speak, dear ; what is it ?” And she crouched down on the ground, and, winding her arms round Heather’s neck, drew the dear face close to her own. “What is this trouble, sweet ?” she persisted ; but the only answer Heather could make was—“Oh ! Bessie—oh ! Bessie,” as she held the locket towards her, moaning, moaning all the while.

“Do you wish me to open it ?” Bessie inquired ; and Heather made a gesture of assent. She had always been a little jealous, and now she was afraid to reveal, with her own hands, the secret it contained. And yet she longed to know—was it portrait or hair—was it an old love-token, or a more recent souvenir which her husband had worn next his heart, next where she ought to have been alone ? God keep us all from hard and hasty and suspicious judgments. With the man upstairs hovering between life and death, Heather still could not help misjudging him. Worse than the whole of the long ordeal she had passed through was the sight of that golden trifle, which she dared not examine, which Bessie first turned over and then opened, holding it up to the light as she did so.

There was a scrap of hair in it—a tiny curl of

golden red, and "Lally" engraved in black letters round the edge.

"Where did you get this, Heather?" she inquired.

"He wore it," Heather answered.

"He! Oh! poor—poor Arthur!" and the tears poured from Bessie's eyes as she looked upon the trinket. She had never thought to like Arthur greatly, or to be sorry for him over much; but now it seemed to her, thinking of the tragedy which had just been enacted, that no one had ever quite understood him, ever imagined it possible Arthur should find out his error, and try to repair it too late—too late!

"Why do you say 'Poor Arthur?'" Heather broke forth, passionately; "why do you not pity me, finding out, after all, he was wearing next his heart a love token from that woman—that bad, cruel——"

"Hush, Heather!—hush—hush!" and Beessie put the open locket into her friend's hand. "See what it really is—not what you imagine at all."

Incredulously almost, Heather did as she was requested; then "Lally—Lally!" said the bereaved

mother; "Lally, Lally!" and she covered the locket with hungry kisses.

"I have passed through the bitterness of death to-night, Bessie!" she exclaimed, at length. "I think it must be near morning now."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## SUNSET AT BERRIE DOWN.

It was near morning ; but before that new time, full of hope, and joy, and promise, dawned upon her life, there came a period of blessed unconsciousness, during which Heather Dudley lay ignorant of all passing events.

How Arthur came back from the valley of the shadow—how the management of their affairs was taken by stronger and abler hands than any which had hitherto touched them—how everything was made right with Mr. Lukin, and gossip silenced, and ill-nature refuted, she did not know until the long fever was over—until, seated again beside one of the windows of that pleasant drawing-room at Berrie Down, she could have fancied the events I have tried in this story to chronicle were all parts

and portions of some unpleasant dream—of some weary attack of delirium.

For they were once more in the old house which Mr. Croft had purchased when it was for sale, and the management of which he had offered through his agent first to Arthur, and then to Alick.

“And, had I known who my real master was,” said that young gentleman, “I never would have accepted the post.”

“Are you sorry you were ignorant?” asked Mr. Croft, with a smile, glancing towards Heather.

“No—oh, no!” was the quick reply; for every one now knew, that when Mr. Croft appeared so opportunely in Silk Street, he was coming to tell Mrs. Dudley of his wife’s death—coming to say, that if Bessie could only be induced to accept him, he would make reparation—he would prove his repentance.

There was not a relation he had in the world who opposed his decision—not one who, hearing the full details of that sad story, urged a word against the girl whom he desired, after a due interval, to make his wife.

All the reluctance was with Bessie—all the

difficulty he experienced lay in her disinclination to speak to him, or listen to his suit.

"Her child," she said to Heather, "would be looked down on." Her child who, now chattering his first intelligible sentences, ran through the gardens at Berrie Down, making that sound of young life about the place which is always so pleasant to hear.

But there was hope for the suitor, nevertheless. In due time, Heather promised to take up his cause.

"I will talk to her when I get strong," she said to Mr. Croft; and with that assurance he rested satisfied.

As for Mrs. Poole Seymour, she was quite enthusiastic about the affair.

"My dear," she declared, "you must not be cruel. You ought to be the first to forgive him, since it was your pretty face led him so far astray; and as for your child—the estate is not entailed—what matter? besides, Mr. Stewart is *so* rich, and has taken to you so immensely!"

Which was true. Mr. Stewart was delighted with Bessie, and perhaps even more delighted with her child—a fine, sturdy young fellow, who, riding

on Nep, encountered Mr. Stewart one day in Berrie Down.

"What is your name, my little man?" asked the bachelor, stopping him and his nurse, Priscilla.

"Mamma says, I'm a young Turk," was the answer. "What's yours?"

"Oh! I'm an old Turk!" replied Mr. Stewart; whereupon the child burst out laughing; and, striking Nep with his heels, the dog broke into a sling-trot and bore Master Douglas off to Berrie Down.

"He only told you the truth, sir," said Priscilla, before she started off in pursuit; "he's an awful young Turk."

In due time, Mr. Stewart reached the Hollow, where he found Lord Kemms, who was decidedly smitten by Agnes; and they all spent the evening talking quietly together while the sun sank into the west, and bathed the whole country lying exposed to his beams in a glory of crimson and purple and gold.

"I have brought you a little present, Heather," Mr. Stewart said, drawing near the sofa she occupied. "It is the custom for god-fathers to give their god-children little presents occasionally, and I fear I



have been somewhat neglectful of you. Open it when I am gone," and he slipped a parcel into her hand.

But Heather, with a pretty wilfulness, opened it at once, and drawing out the parchments it contained, found them to be the title-deeds of Berrie Down.

"Yours, my dear," said Mr. Stewart, "to have and to hold for ever."

"Arthur, Arthur!" she cried; and Arthur, look-still white and worn, came towards his wife, who put the papers into his hand, saying, "See, love, what Mr. Stewart has given me!"

"Only remember, Mr. Dudley, we must have no speculating; you must keep it intact for your son," added Mr. Stewart—in answer to which remark, Arthur took his wife's hand in his, murmuring, "So help me God!"

Before the sun quite set, Heather drew a shawl round her, and, leaving the pleasant company, passed out on to the lawn, and wandered away towards the Hollow.

"She is thinking of Lally," Alick whispered to Arthur; and Arthur, following his wife, prayed and begged of her not to grieve for the child that was no more.

“Heather,” he said, humbly, “I have been but a poor husband to you ; but I will try in the future, to be ‘better to you than many children.’ Do not fret, love, do not fret.”

But Heather was not fretting. She felt now that her darling was where she could see continually the face of “Our Father which is in Heaven.”

•

THE END.

TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW NOVELS  
AT ALL LIBRARIES.

---

*Black Sheep.*

By EDMUND YATES, Author of "The Forlorn Hope,"  
"Kissing the Rod," etc. Reprinted from "All the  
Year Round." 3 vols.

---

*Sowing the Wind.*

By Mrs. E. LYNN LINTON. Author of "Lizzie Lorton  
of Greyrigg," etc. 3 vols.

---

*Seventy-Five Brooke Street.*

By PERCY FITZGERALD, Author of "The Second Mrs.  
Tillotson." etc. 3 vols.

---

*The Forlorn Hope.*

By EDMUND YATES, Author of "Black Sheep,"  
"Kissing the Rod," etc. 3 vols.

---

*The Tallants of Barton.*

By JOSEPH HATTON, Author of "Bitter Sweets," etc.  
3 vols.

---

*Captain Jack; or, the Great Van Broek*  
Property. By J. A. MAITLAND. 2 vols.

---

*Ada Moore's Story.*

3 vols.

---

*Called to Account.*

By ANNIE THOMAS, Author of "Denis Donne," "Sir  
Victor's Choice," etc. 3 vols.

---

TINSLEY BROTHERS 18 CATHERINE STREET.





•  
•

